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Faith in Action for Social Justice

Confessions of a Comfortable Christian

Having money
and following Jesus

by John Thornton Jr.

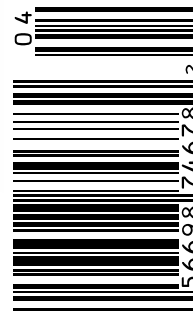


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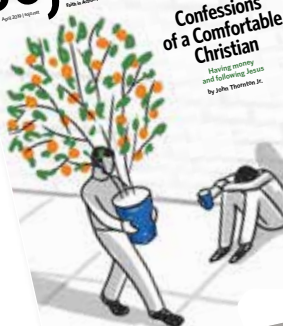


16



22

sojourners



36

sojourners contents

APRIL 2019 Vol. 48 | No. 4

COVER

- 16 What the Bible Doesn't Say About Financial Security**
Christians often treat money as a private concern, but that's not what scripture teaches.
by John Thornton Jr.

FEATURES

- 22 #PastorsToo**
Even clergy are targets of sexual harassment.
by Karen A. McClintock
Plus: A conversation with Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi/26
- 28 How Racism Wins**
Watch the devil distract with extremity and hyperbole.
by Jay Wamsted

CULTURE WATCH

- 36 Mrs. Dalloway and a theology of hospitality**
Reviews: *The Color of Compromise*; *The Seventh Story*; *A Riff of Love*
- 38 Eyes & Ears**, by Danny Duncan Collum
- 39 On Film**, by Gareth Higgins

COMMENTARY

- 8 Chinese Christians**
9 Colin Kaepernick
10 Detention centers

DEPARTMENTS

- 5 Letters**
12 Homepage
43 Poetry
44 Living the Word
by Martin L. Smith

COLUMNS

- 7 Hearts & Minds**
by Jim Wallis
- 14 Building Bridges**
by Eboo Patel
- 21 Unfiltered**
by Kathy Khang
- 32 The Hungry Spirit**
by Rose Marie Berger
- 46 H'rumphs**
by Ed Spivey Jr.



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IF YOU PROVIDE 48 hours' notice and \$2,000, Industry Kitchen, a New York City restaurant near Wall Street, will serve you a pizza covered with edible 24-karat gold. In response to an article promising "7 gold-covered foods" that "will break your bank," *Washington Post* opinion columnist Elizabeth Bruenig tweeted that "covering good food in expensive garbage" is "for rich people who have so much money they can't think of anything else to do with it than literally turn it into [excrement]."

We don't have that kind of money; our idea of fancy food is forking over an extra buck or two for avocado on our sandwich. But though we don't eat gilded food, we have to confess that we've fallen short on following Jesus' instructions to sell all we have and give to the poor. "I drive a car, go on

vacation, and eat at restaurants with friends," writes John Thornton in "What the Bible Doesn't Say about Financial Security." "I have health insurance, a bank account, and a job." So do we.

The most extreme incarnations of racism provide "an easy way out of introspection and self-recrimination," writes Jay Wamsted in this issue. In a world where Dylann Roof, Confederate flags, and Nazi tattoos take center stage, it's easy for white people to think "This is what racism looks like," writes Wamsted. "Racism screams at people of color in the streets. It bullies and threatens, trolls and tweets. I do none of these things." And then the devil whispers: "Therefore, you



cannot be racist."

Something similar happens when we talk about money: It's easy to talk about Jesus' radical economics when the problem is billionaires and luxury pizza. Yet figuring out what

the gospel means when it comes to our own paychecks, bank accounts, debt, and retirement savings (or lack thereof) is trickier. What would a gospel-centered approach to our finances look like? And could we dare to follow it?

"Precious few saints take a vow of poverty, get rid of their possessions, give to the poor, and follow Jesus," writes Thornton. "But the rest of us can't just dismiss Jesus' words as hopelessly unrealistic." ■

Letters

A Powerful Profile

Thank you, Da'Shawn Mosley, for your profile of attorney Benjamin Crump ("The Advocate," February 2019). You captured his passion and faith-oriented vision for combating the powers of racism and violence through the legal system. I wish you well in telling stories that will bring insight, anguish, hope, and resolve to people seeking to be Jesus followers in this world.

Greg Bowman
Salem, Ohio

Lived Faith

"The Advocate" is an example of how some Christians just chatter about their faith while others go out and live it.

Susan Gunn
Round Rock, Texas

Much-Needed Discussion

I appreciate Nadia Bolz-Weber's perspective ("Honor Thy Sexual Pleasure?" February 2019) and find her comments in need of more explanation and discussion. As an older, single person, I hope the conversation continues.

Joanne Hansen
Richfield, Minnesota

Modeling Love

In addition to the financial security

Catholics who want to build a church that is accountable must speak out.

provided by the church model in Hillary Frances' "Here Is the Church, Here Is No Steeple" (December 2018), the ability to focus on service and community with open arms for all resonates with a much larger pool of potential church members. This is obviously greatly needed today as membership with many religious organizations continues to shrink. I believe this model based on action, love, sharing, and caring for *all* our neighbors has the potential to unite and strengthen our communities as well as the church. A revitalization is on the way thanks to passionate and talented ministers such as Mandy McDow.

Denise Anderman
Manhattan Beach, California

An Accountable Church

Thank you to Rose Marie Berger for "No More Cover-Ups" in the December 2018 issue of *Sojourners*. I, too, am a Roman Catholic pained to see the mission and significance of my church become more eroded by reports of sexual abuse, the clericalism of priests and bishops, and the lack of will by

the papacy to address these concerns. Much of what I see within my church concerns me. Yet my faith and belief in the meaning and relevance of the Eucharist brings me back weekly to worship with others, many of whom feel as I do.

Catholics who want to build a church that is open, transparent, accountable, vibrant, and willing to face the truth and accept responsibility for harm must speak out. Otherwise, there will be no accountability and no will to change. I want to work with others who are ready to pose difficult and challenging questions to our church's patriarchal hierarchy. By remaining silent, I am continuing to sanction and support how my church is mired in all the pitfalls of clericalism identified by Jesus in Matthew 23.

Gerry Sobie
Castlegar, British Columbia

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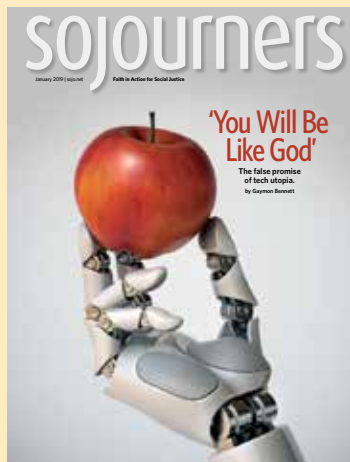
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BY JIM WALLIS

A Glimpse of the Future



Minnesota Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan, the highest-ranking Indigenous woman ever elected to a state's executive office, fist-bumps Gov. Tim Walz at their inauguration.

ON JAN. 7, I was in St. Paul, Minn., where Peggy Flanagan was sworn in as Minnesota's lieutenant governor. Peggy has been a close friend and ally of Sojourners for many years, serving as a member of our board executive committee, and she has been like a daughter to me and my family.

What I saw and heard from Peggy could be a glimpse of the future of American politics. It felt so different from the divisive political situation I had just come from in Washington, D.C. It was a historical moment as Peggy Flanagan was sworn in as the highest-ranking Indigenous woman ever elected to a state's executive office. I would like to give my space to present her words, adapted from her inaugural speech:

"MY STORY IS a One Minnesota story. It's about community. We didn't have much growing up. What little we had, my mom used to make sure we got ahead. But it didn't always add up. We needed help. I was the kid with the different-colored lunch ticket. We needed those free meals at school. Medicaid saved my life. As a kid with asthma, it's the reason I'm alive today.

Growing up wasn't always easy, but it made me strong. I stand before you today because of a loving family, a supportive community, and a great state. My vocation is to create community across Minnesota—a

possible for me to believe in myself. Their support created pathways for me. My mission is to help create pathways for every Minnesotan—whether they live with a single mom in Section 8 housing, they are a farm kid struggling to figure out whether they can stay on the land they love,



or an Iron Ranger who lost her job in the mine and is desperately searching for another way to support her family.

Tim Walz chose me as a governing partner because he believes in creating space for new voices. I'm proud to open the door. And now my job is to hold that door wide open for others.

My story is filled with contradictions. A few moments ago, I was sworn in on a Bible from 1854. It's written in the Ojibwe language. I chose this Bible because it has deep spiritual meaning to me as a Catholic—but this Bible also was a tool used to erase Native people's culture and traditions.

These contradictions are present throughout our history. I stand before you now as a leader of the executive office of Minnesota—an office that oversaw horrific treatment of my ancestors. An office whose governor once declared that our Dakota brothers and sisters 'must be exterminated or driven forever beyond the borders of

Minnesota.' And yet this is the same office that in 2012 repudiated those hateful words and actions of a previous administration. I'm happy the Dakota people are still here.

My people talk about walking in two worlds. But one of my most treasured mentors encouraged me to reject that idea. I am an Ojibwe woman, and I am an Ojibwe woman all the time. I have a responsibility, especially because of those who came before me and cleared a path, to do good for my people. All the time. I am an Ojibwe woman. I am a mother. I am a Minnesotan. This is the lens through which I see the world, and the lens through which I will do my work as lieutenant governor. Our past informs who we are, but we build our future together.

I have a 5-year-old daughter. Her name is Siobhan. She is a funny, energetic, opinionated little Anishinaabkwe who recently lost her first tooth and attended her first Native American Affinity Group meeting at her school. My job is to show young people like her what is possible. To all young Indigenous people, young people of color, and young people in rural communities who feel forgotten: You deserve to be seen, heard, and valued. There is a place for you in this work. Your own story and experiences are valid. You deserve to have a voice within your own community and your own future.

Our future is bright. One Minnesota is grounded in the fact that people directly affected by decisions have a seat at the table. One Minnesota does not mean we are all the same. One Minnesota means we work together across lines of differences to find our shared values and improve people's lives. Let's get to work. *Chi miigwech.*" ■

Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners magazine.

"My story is filled with contradictions."

community like mine that lifts people up and provides them a little help when they need it.

I am where I am today because of people who believed in me—my parents, my teachers, my speech coach, my college professors. And I'm here because of the late Sen. Paul Wellstone, whose last campaign was my first. Their belief in me made it

John Autey/Twin Cities Pioneer Press



Christians in China lead public calisthenics in Nanping, a city in the coastal province of Fujian, in 2016.

Michel Chambon

By Michel Chambon

‘Kill the Chicken to Scare the Monkeys’

Chinese Christians feel the heavy hand of increased state control.

HUMAN RIGHTS monitors have been raising alarms about the treatment of Christians in China. A report from Open Doors World Watch List said that Asia is “the new hot-bed of persecution for Christians.” Some Chinese church leaders are saying, “It’s the worst since the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976,” according to an Open Doors spokesperson.

Over the past 30 years, China has undergone one of the largest social and economic transformations ever seen. Nearly a billion people moved from peasantry to a modern middle-class lifestyle. While this change involved enormous economic progress for many people, it also entailed massive migrations, deep reorganization of family structures, and extensive urbanization. These came with growing social inequalities, rampant corruption, and environmental disasters.

In 2012, Xi Jinping was appointed as the new general secretary of the Communist Party; he became president in 2013. Xi has required extreme party loyalty and encouraged various economic reforms. Although his policy reduced corruption and smoothed the country’s transition, the changes have

not protected China from a concerning economic slowdown.

In the context of this massive transformation, what specific difficulties affect Chinese Christians?

China has gained more Christian believers over the past 40 years, with the number

Chinese officials have destroyed churches and jailed leaders.

of Chinese Protestants increasing by an average of 10 percent per year since the late 1970s, but Christians still represent only 2 to 4 percent of China’s population. Despite their increase, Christians are neither a threat to social cohesion nor a major political challenge to Beijing. The state is far more concerned about a trade war with the U.S., China’s aging population, and environmental damage. And, despite its communist legacy, Beijing is not specifically obsessed with religion, or Christianity in particular.

The Chinese state—like every other state—operates under its own political tradition and in relation to its own national culture. Chinese religious policy is not only

defined by a supposedly coherent national law but also through the agency of local officials who play a key role in its implementation. In practice, state control is heterogeneous and varies from district to district. It relies on the balance of power between local officials, religious actors, social needs, and regional history.

In some places, local officials have imposed stricter regulation and monitoring on Christians and other social actors. In other places, they have destroyed Christian churches and jailed a few leaders. But in my view, this does not represent a general crackdown on Christianity. It reflects instead the Chinese policy of “killing a chicken to scare the monkeys”—applying a heavy hand on one group is publicized to push others toward self-limitation and censorship.

The Chinese state says it has increased its control over its citizens for the sake of “progress,” and many Chinese Christians are proud of the national transformation that the party has produced. Yet others are concerned with the revival of traditional religions and wonder how to better proclaim the presence of Christ in their changing

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society. The most urgent and concrete tasks for these Christians center around converting family members and friends.

Many Chinese Christians avoid a confrontational relationship with the state. They prioritize service to their neighbors, engaging with non-Christians in many ways, including through online testimonies, promoting outdoor group calisthenics, hosting large Christmas parties with coworkers, and sponsoring Christian homes for the elderly.

However, Christians feel the heavier presence of the administration in an era of increased state control on all sectors of society. Over the last few years, Christian

communities have seen their capacities to freely engage with the broader society narrow, in a few places dangerously so.

Those who care about the church in China should remember that Chinese Christians are not homogeneous. They represent a vast theological and ecclesiological spectrum and are often at risk of being used as pawns within international political rivalries as well as by their own state. ■

Michel Chambon, a Catholic theologian and anthropologist, studies the growth of Protestantism in China. He has made regular visits to China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong for the past 16 years.

By Walter Brueggemann

Free Agents

Both Copernicus and Kaepernick teach us to see the world differently.

THOMAS KUHN introduced the term “paradigm shift” into common parlance in the 1960s. New paradigms teach us to see the world differently. When we receive a new paradigm, all the data flees the old one and settles into the new. For Kuhn, the classic example of a paradigm shift is the way Copernicus’ solar-centered model of the world displaced Ptolemy’s Earth-centered theory during the European Renaissance.

I knew all of that. But when Irish poet Micheal O’Siadhail referred to Copernicus as “Copernik” in his recent release, *The Five Quintets*, it set me toward a new thought. “Copernik” (first name Nicolaus) sounds a lot like “Kaepernick” (first name Colin).

It followed for me that Copernik (with his solar-centered hypothesis) and Kaepernick (with his refusal to stand during the national anthem at NFL games) were up to the same thing. Both performed new paradigms. While Copernik’s is now settled theory, Kaepernick’s remains highly contested. It is, moreover, highly contested precisely because it is a new paradigm that threatens everything invested in the old paradigm.

The old paradigm, so treasured in the NFL, consists in a drama of violence, money, and sex (covered by pseudo-nationalism). It provides for rich white “owners” to stage violent struggles between mostly black players.

That old paradigm requires black players to conform to the ideology of white owners who use the U.S. flag to legitimate their enormous wealth and control, as if these were somehow patriotic. And because the liturgy of sex-money-violence-nationalism has become so ordinary and routine, no one notices it—exactly how the owners prefer.

Now comes Colin Kaepernick with a new paradigm that asserts that black players are free agents who are not “owned” and who do not need to participate in, collude with, or endorse the owner’s ideology.

All of that is voiced in the simple act of refusing to stand—of kneeling instead during the national anthem. That act of visible resistance places much in jeopardy about the old liturgy, and provokes the NFL owners, the U.S. president, and all of those who have a stake in old power arrangements.

THE RESPONSE TO Kaepernick’s action was as vigorous and negative as it was for Nicolaus Copernik, and for the same reason. The unraveling of the old consensus puts at risk much that had been taken as settled and certain. With that jeopardy comes exposure of old racist “ownership,” old inequality of wealth, and the old tacit assumptions that the U.S. flag is allied with white racist wealth.

Nicolaus and Colin have two crucial matters in common. First, they are both

From the Archives

March-April 1996

To My Sentencing Judge

THE POLITICAL

leaders in place at this time are constructing social policy and vision that is fundamentally destructive of human life and well-being, particularly of those most marginalized by our governmental system. ... We must each choose the moment we step out of the line and take the consequences. ...

I grew up in South Carolina and have spent many afternoons crabbing its low-country marshes and waters. Normally, I cook them by boiling them. There are two ways to boil crab. The one bound to elicit a battle with the crab is to bring the pot to a rolling boil and then put the crab in. It fights. It grabs at the pot with its large claws. Eventually it succumbs. The alternate method (crueler, I think) is to put the crab in cool water, which it settles into gracefully, and then heat it slowly. It heats so slowly, the crab never figures out when to try to climb out of the pot. It dies calmly huddled at the bottom of the pot.

Public policies and social terms of debate evolve and change slowly, like that water. My [choice to commit civil disobedience] was a step to say that the water, which has been gradually changing over more than a decade, was too hot to tolerate. Each one of us—you, myself, our government officials—test the waters. Some of us, one day, will decide that they are changing in ways that threaten life—threaten our integrity and threaten the definition of what we feel it means to be human. Or, in my case, to be faithful. ■

Dee Dee Risher was co-editor of The Other Side magazine when this article appeared.



discerned as heretics who have departed from settled orthodoxy. The beneficiaries and guarantors of the old orthodoxy will have none of it. It was a huge matter for Copernik to conclude that the Earth is not the center of all reality.

Second, both face insistent pressure to conform to the old orthodoxy and to give visible assent, even if they think or know otherwise. Thus, Nicolaus was pressured to conform to church teaching about an Earth-centered universe. And Colin is pressured to conform to the dominant liturgy by standing for the anthem, no matter what he thinks or believes. Both were expected to submit. The managers of the old orthodoxy recognize that if such a first step of unraveling is not blocked, there will be no end to it. The pressure to conform is absolute for Colin, so that he cannot get a job in the NFL—banned from the plantation!

The whole church, it occurs to me, has as our work (and as our joy) advocacy for the new paradigm. The new paradigm

contradicts the old certitudes of white male hegemony and the accumulation of inordinate wealth under the flag of patriotism. Kaepernick's new paradigm is as far-reaching and dangerous to the old order as Copernik's was to his! It is our work to see to the rejection of the old paradigm and to assure that the data is transferred to the new paradigm (and so radically rearranged) where it takes on new generative power.

In the case of Colin Kaepernick, there are many who have signed on for the new paradigm. We can see that the new paradigm (of refusing to stand in honor before exploitative power) is as old as Moses and as defining as Jesus. It turns out that the "old, old story" becomes the "new, new song." That "new song" of peace, justice, and freedom, moreover, only slightly overlaps with the "anthems" sung in the liturgies of the NFL. ■

Walter Brueggemann, a Sojourners contributing editor, is professor emeritus at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Ga.

By Richard N. Williams

A Business Built on Immigrant Anguish

The private prison industry is making billions off of detention centers.

AT 146 CCA ROAD in Lumpkin, Ga., sits the Stewart Detention Center, one of the nation's largest immigrant holding facilities. It's also a multimillion-dollar revenue-generating business. The nearly 2,000-bed facility, originally built as a medium-security prison, is owned and operated by CoreCivic (formerly known as the Corrections Corporation of America), the second largest private prison firm in the United States.

Private detention centers, such as Stewart, are major sources of revenue for the private prison industry. CoreCivic is currently trading on the New York Stock Exchange with market capitalization of more than \$2.36 billion. The private corrections industry, according to a 2017 *Mother Jones* article, has received endorsements from then-Attorney General Jeff Sessions and President Donald Trump. The industry's stocks soared after the president's executive order to expand the purview of Immigration and Customs Enforcement. With billions in revenue being generated and a government not relenting

from its war against undocumented immigrants, private detention centers such as Stewart seem to be here for the long haul.

Stewart is plagued with "chronic shortages," especially in its medical facility. There are reports of drug smuggling, suicides, and mixing asylum seekers with convicted criminals. Between 2007 and 2012, only 6 percent of detainees at Stewart received legal counsel during their immigration process; only 4 percent were granted asylum. Most undocumented immigrants at Stewart will spend their only time in the U.S. locked up with hardened criminals, subjected to inhumane treatment.

In November, I visited Stewart with the help of El Refugio, a nonprofit founded in 2007 to serve immigrants. Long waiting periods preceded the visitation process—a process that felt intentionally dehumanizing. The waiting area was small, with few chairs. Stewart's remote location and complicated visitation process have kept it below the media radar, making it easier

for CoreCivic to provide poor living conditions and rake in a profit.

On my visit, I met with a detained asylum seeker. We sat across from each other, separated by bulletproof plastic and concrete block, talking over a phone line. He told me that in his home country he had been a political official; when his government was overthrown, he became an enemy of the new regime. He fled with his family to the U.S., but they were separated at the California border.

In our short conversation we bonded as husbands and fathers, but also as Christians. He admitted to crippling depression and grief, and said that he prays every day. He told me he prayed earlier in the week for someone to visit him, to take his mind off his plight. Though we were from different parts of the world, we both knew the Lord's Prayer, and so we prayed it together. As we prayed, the hellhole was transformed into holy ground.

In April 2018, a class-action suit was filed by the Southern Poverty Law Center on behalf of current and former detained immigrants. "CoreCivic is placing profits above people by forcing detained immigrants to perform manual labor for next to nothing, saving millions of dollars that would otherwise provide jobs and stimulate the local economy," said Meredith Stewart, senior attorney for the center. "CoreCivic is padding its pockets by violating anti-trafficking laws."

Detainees who refuse to work in CoreCivic's "dollar a day" forced-labor scheme are threatened with solitary confinement, according to the lawsuit, and the loss of access to food, clothing, phone calls, and other necessities, in violation of federal anti-trafficking laws.

On my visit, I saw not a criminal or a gang member (as some people stereotype immigrants) but a God-fearing man who, if granted asylum, would become another thread in the diverse fabric of America. Though treated terribly by the system, he still speaks glowingly of the possibility of this country. He still believes the potential to be a U.S. citizen is worth all that his family has endured. ■

Richard N. Williams is a student at Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta.



***Here, Now, With You:
Six Movements of Compassion
for Life and Leadership***

Gregg Louis Taylor
(Foreword by Father Gregory Boyle)

Engage in movements of compassion for life and leadership. Stymied by a spirituality gone stale? Mired down from going through religious motions, and yet suspect there is much more? If so, this book is for you. If you

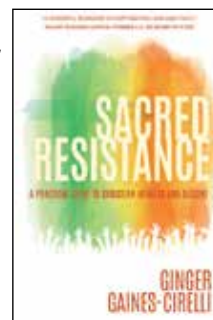
want to cultivate a wildly welcoming, compassionate space of grace in which anyone connected to or touched by your faith community feels accepted and loved, *Here, Now, With You* is written with you in mind. gregglouistaylor.com.

***Sacred Resistance: A Practical Guide
to Christian Witness and Dissent***

Ginger Gaines-Cirelli

Get empowered to speak out and act in

troubled times. Are you seeking help with how to respond and lead in these troubled, polarized times? The need for courage to speak out and act is ever-present. Ginger Gaines-Cirelli pastors a church in Washington DC, adjacent to the White House, which actively works to bring justice and help for marginalized communities, refugees and immigrants, and the endangered earth. Her leadership is deeply rooted in a well-developed theological understanding. SacredResistance.net.



***Preaching Truth in the Age of
Alternative Facts***

William Bosend

Successfully walk the tightrope of preaching when there are few agreed upon "facts."

Good preaching has always been a challenge, a combination of exegesis, insight and craft in witness to the Gospel and in service of the Church. Cultural forces, in particular the proliferation of media outlets and the explosion of available entertainment sources, have only made the challenge greater. And that was when most agreed on a common set of facts. Those days are now past and gone. William Bosend offers a way forward.

AbingdonPress.com

VIDEOS



The 1,500-square-foot garden at Pleasant Hope Baptist Church in Baltimore yields more than 1,100 pounds of produce every year.

Courtesy of the Black Church Food Security Network

Put Forth Vegetation!

The Black Church Food Security Network is a partnership between black farmers and churches in Maryland, Washington, D.C., Virginia, and North Carolina to make fresh produce more accessible to black and brown communities.

"Programmatic solutions to systemic problems only go so far," said Rev. Heber Brown III, who started the network in 2015 in response to diet-related health issues in his congregation. "What is a systemic solution that's not dependent upon grants or government subsidies, or corporations and their donations?"

What is something that black and brown people can create for themselves?"

Watch more at sojo.net/videos.

CULTURE



Ka-boom!

Cave Pictures Publishing is a new comic publisher on a mission to connect audiences with spiritually meaningful stories. Abby Olcese spoke with Cave president Mandi Hart and publisher Mark Rodgers about the ancient superpowers of myth and image.

Why create a faith-inspired comic book publishing company? Rodgers: We named the company Cave Pictures because of the various efforts of human society to try to define this place, find meaning in the universe, and explore transcendence and God, sometimes through paintings on cave walls. We're now really driven in our current context by visual images and story combined, and I think graphic novels and comics, their day is now.

What audiences are you hoping to reach? Hart: Our primary audience is Gen Z and young millennials who are spiritually sensitive, but not necessarily identified with a particular religious institution. But, because our stories all interweave spiritual themes and questions of meaning, they are also accessible to audiences who would identify with a particular faith or religious tradition.

Some of your forthcoming titles are horror comics. What does that genre offer readers spiritually? Hart: When you think a little more deeply about the common element in something like a horror comic, it's supernatural fiction. ... In all of our stories, redemption and sacrifice and the power of love are also important themes, which can resonate really well with readers who are interested in that sort of spiritual introspection.

Read more at sojo.net/comics.

QUOTED

“The average age of a victim of child abuse coming forward is 52.”

— **Tim Lennon**
on the pattern of sex abuse in the
Roman Catholic Church
sojo.net/lennon



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90% of pastors
have dealt with domestic or sexual
violence situations, but only 50% have
sufficient training to address it.

Broken Silence 2.0

An Update on Pastors' Attitudes and Actions around Domestic
and Sexual Violence in the #MeToo Era

Commissioned by We Will Speak Out, IMA World Health, and Sojourners

See the results at wewillspeakout.us/broken-silence



A Place for Us?

LAURA KIM TELLS an illustrative story in the *Race/Related* newsletter published by *The New York Times* about a white boss who responded to her request for promotion by saying, “You’re so good at what you do. I thought you wanted to stay in your position forever ... Normally, Asian women keep their heads down and stay very quiet.”

It is the kind of story that professional, middle-class Asian Americans are telling more and more these days. Stereotyped as determined and technically competent, but not especially creative, we might be the kind of people you’d want as your accountant or computer expert, but we are definitely not management material. In my experience, Kim’s story rings true, but it’s not the only true story about Asian-American experiences.

I think that’s one of the reasons I found Fatima Farheen Mirza’s debut novel, *A Place for Us*, about an immigrant South Asian Shia Muslim family in post-9/11 California, so interesting. As part of a South Asian Shia Muslim community myself



Fatima Farheen Mirza with members of the National Book Foundation BOOK UP program.

Photo courtesy of Fatima Farheen Mirza

parties, all without the prying eyes of your parents and the wagging fingers of community members. At home, at the mosque, at Muslim events, you bore the burden of your tradition. Your words and deeds represented your parents at all times.

I remember this well. My middle-class, suburban, South Asian friends and I spoke often about the freedoms of the white world. Why were we pressured to be doctors and engineers when other kids were told only to dream big dreams—and without even being expected to finish their homework? Why were our parents so uptight about the opposite sex? Why did we carry the burden of their reputations?

Mirza’s novel has a striking scene about racism. It involves a fight that Amar (the only son and youngest child) gets into when he faces a pack of boys in the locker room who taunt him about his Muslim faith.

Racism was something I and the other suburban South Asians I knew experienced daily growing up, but rarely talked about. Instead, we simply accepted its existence, like the change

of seasons. On rare occasions the racism went from microaggression to macroaggression, and we felt as if we needed to fight to preserve a shred of dignity, but mostly we just kept our heads down and endured it.

A significant improvement in the diversity discourse of our era is to name that racism—both the smaller slights and the egregious violations—and to declare all of it out of bounds.

But what too much diversity discourse in the Trump era misses is how minority communities themselves, and not just the broader white culture, pass judgments and assign roles, judgments and roles that can often feel more constricting than the ones on offer in the wider world.

Among the many challenges of being a South Asian Muslim is negotiating all of this complexity. Appreciating the tradition that you come from but chafing against its restrictions. Wanting the freedoms of the white world, while frequently feeling as if you are a stranger there. ■

Eboo Patel, founder of the Interfaith Youth Core, writes about pluralism from his perspective as a Muslim American.

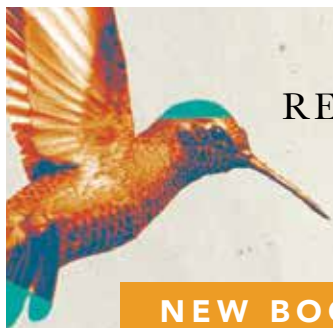


My middle-class, suburban, South Asian friends and I spoke often about the freedoms of the white world.

(the Ismaili community), the various religious references (to Imam Ali and Imam Hussain, to the presence of the Quran as a protection) felt both familiar and comforting.

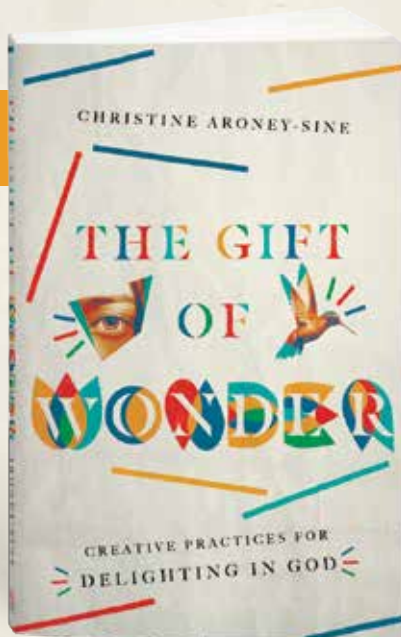
Equally familiar, if less comforting, were the family dynamics. The lives of the children were governed by rules written by religious tradition, maintained by family, and enforced by the broader community.

The kids largely viewed the white world outside the home as a place of freedom, a world where you could choose your own path of study, select your own romantic partner, and go to



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WHAT THE BIBLE DOESN'T

**Christians often treat money as a private concern,
but that's not what scripture teaches.**

by **JOHN THORNTON JR.**

"JOHN, THERE'S, UH, A GUY YOU NEED TO COME SEE
in the sanctuary. I think he's angry or upset or something."

Hearing these words on a Sunday morning while I sat in my office preparing for worship meant one thing: Someone needed money. One of the hazards (or opportunities) of working in a downtown church was that the steeple and columns out front signaled to people that they should drop in when they needed a few dollars. I became the go-to minister on staff to greet these visitors.



Illustration by Jon Krause

SAY ABOUT FINANCIAL SECURITY



Our reluctance
to talk about
money in church
obscures its place
of concern in
our lives.



I heard the man before I saw him. His sobs were audible over the only other noise in the space, the women arranging flowers for our 10:30 a.m. service. He was seated in the next-to-last row of the opulent sanctuary built in 1924. White and in his 40s, the man looked put-together but sweaty, his denim jacket well-worn. I introduced myself, told him I was glad he'd come to our church that morning, and asked if there was anything I could do for him. The man—I'll call him James—told a familiar story: He'd arrived from out of town, didn't know anyone in Winston-Salem, and was currently living at a shelter down the street. "I just don't know what I'm going to do. I'm desperate," he said at a volume that caught the attention of the flower arrangers. "I need some money for a bus pass and I've got to find work. I don't know why God would do this to me."

"This," he said pointing to the piece of paper in his hand, "this is all I want. How can I get this?" He was holding a flyer for our discontinued financial literacy class. I told him we no longer offered the class and didn't have any funds available for assistance.

I drive a car, go on vacation, and eat at restaurants with friends. I have health insurance, a bank account, and a job. I knew I ought to help the man, but I didn't. Our church's policies around requests of this kind required more oversight than I could give at that moment, and my mind drifted to the other duties I had that morning. I invited him to stay for worship and told him if he came back later in the week, I might be able to refer him to some agencies that could help.

James stayed for the service, sobbing quietly on occasion. In the months that followed, I saw him around downtown, but never again in the sanctuary. I felt disappointed for failing to offer help, for getting caught between conviction and institutional responsibility. As someone who works in ministry, often with poor people, I've learned to live with that feeling to get through my work. Yet I don't want to make peace with that feeling; doing so would be giving up too easily.

Consider the moth

That the United States is a country of inequality is no secret. In 2011, Occupy Wall Street put financial inequality on the cultural and political map, and it has not left since. But having inequality on our political and cultural map is one thing; figuring out what to do about it in our own lives is another.

According to scripture, economic inequality is sinful. The prophets continually warn Israel that exploitation of the poor warrants God's judgment. Jesus—raised on his

mother's song about God lifting up the lowly and casting down the mighty—announces good news for the poor. But as Christians called to a life of faithful discipleship, what does that mean for those of us who have money in our bank accounts, perhaps even a 401(k), when there's a desperate person sitting in the sanctuary?

In Matthew 19:16-22, Jesus seems to offer a clear answer to this dilemma. Approached by a young man with “many possessions” who wants to know what he ought to do to more fully love God and his neighbor, Jesus offers instructions that have unsettled Christians for millennia: Sell all you have, give the proceeds to the poor, and follow me.

In *Hope in the Dark*, Rebecca Solnit writes about the dangers and possibilities of utopic horizons. There's a danger that we hold onto such visions too tightly only to become sorely disappointed when they don't come to fruition when we think they should. But Solnit also notes that nocturnal insects, like moths, use the stars and moon to navigate even though these creatures will never achieve the altitude they'd need to reach outer space. She hopes those working for social justice do the same with their own visions of utopia: use them in navigating this world toward the next, even if we don't quite see how the two will meet. Heaven isn't just a destination, but also “an idea to navigate Earth by,” she writes. “Don't believe that the moon is useless unless we land on it.”

I think about Solnit's words when I read Jesus' instructions in Matthew. Few people will ever walk on the moon, just as precious few saints take a vow of poverty, get rid of their possessions, give to the poor, and follow Jesus. But the rest of us can't just dismiss Jesus' words as hopelessly unrealistic. Instead, Jesus' words hold us to a higher standard and help us to navigate life here.

About that barn

In Luke's gospel, Jesus tells the story of a “rich man” whose harvest produces a huge return. He builds up big barns for himself, storing up the surplus so that he can prop up his feet and enjoy life. But that night, the guy dies. Jesus warns the thousands listening, “So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

One way of reading this passage is as a condemnation of retirement savings, 401(k) plans, even bank accounts. After all, that money could be used to help those in need, buy a bus pass for James, or even secure a few months' rent.

Financial inequality
creates the problem,
but instability
makes us
nervous
to act.



We often frame Bible passages about money as *individual* choices.

But I'm not sure that reading gets at the full financial picture of many people's lives. We may worry about living a more faithful life with regards to our money, but we aren't ready to kick back like the man in Jesus' story. A recent survey found that 61 percent of Americans couldn't cover a \$1,000 expense with their current savings. Similarly, 40 percent of Americans couldn't even manage \$400. It seems like everyone I know, save the wealthiest few, is just one job loss and hospital visit away from financial ruin.

In *The Financial Diaries*, economics professor Jonathan Morduch and financial expert Rachel Schneider studied the financial lives of 235 families, some in poverty and others solidly middle class. They discovered a hidden force in people's lives: financial instability. Income and expense fluctuations from year to year and even month to month mean that many families—even those whose end-of-year income places them above the poverty line—spend time below it.

I think about these findings when I remember the sanctuary filling up that morning I met James. Looking out at the congregation from behind the pulpit, I saw senior citizens living off Social Security checks, 20-somethings with thousands of dollars in student debt, a family whose financial hardships threatened to tear their marriage apart, a young couple with a mortgage, and a kid losing a job.

So while we may have barns built for a surplus like the man in Jesus' parable, few of us have enough grain to kick back and take it easy; usually we have just enough to get to the next harvest and keep moving. Which is where we find ourselves today: Financial inequality creates the problem, but instability makes us nervous to act. The result is that things stay the same. James is still looking for financial peace; each of us worries about our own situation.

I'm convinced that if we're to resolve these tensions between obedience and compromise, the feeling of helplessness and desire for change, we must do it together.

Yours, mine, ours

When people describe the kinds of community they're looking for in a church, they often use the word "authentic"—a group of people willing to be open, honest, and trustworthy about their lives. So many of us have had the opposite experience, where the church preached one thing while the leaders did something else. People also want a place to be vulnerable, where leaders name their own struggles and people don't fear talking about the problems they face in their lives.

If church is a place to be authentic and vulnerable, that should include our financial lives. A recent survey found that millennials more frequently fear debt than death, yet our reluctance to talk about money in church obscures its place of concern in our lives. Church

becomes just another place to pretend we have it all together—even though many struggle to pay for the basics and most of us live on the edge.

But what if we assumed we're all financially vulnerable? What would church look like if we understood that we could speak truthfully and openly about our financial worries and imagine a different way of being a community together?

To start, we'd need to ask different questions. We often frame Bible passages about money as individual choices: Am I to sell everything I have and give it to the poor? How much is enough for me and my family?

One problem with this is that it accords quite well with a capitalist economy that wants us to treat all matters of money, including its faithful use, as personal problems. Our present political and economic arrangements require us all to think of ourselves as lone individuals. I have *my* bank account, *my* earnings, but also *my* debt, *my* fear of a job loss.

Scripture challenges that understanding. Jesus tells the story of the man with the barns in response to a question about divided inheritance and follows it with an admonition for his followers to worry less about tomorrow and more about giving to those who need it. One can't help but think that if they followed Jesus' advice, they might find themselves in a very different kind of community. And in the story of the young man with many possessions, Jesus doesn't just tell him to sell his possessions and give to the poor; Jesus also invites the man to join Jesus' followers.

Should we sell our possessions and give to the Jameses of our lives? Probably. But we do so not to be good individuals, but rather because Jesus instructs us to form a community that counters the individualism of our larger society. Our money divides us from one another through inequality and instability. As philosopher G.A. Cohen puts it in *Why Not Socialism?* "We cannot enjoy full community, you and I, if you make, and keep, say, 10 times as much money as I do, because my life will then labor under challenges that you will never face, challenges that you could help me to cope with, but do not because you keep your money."

We belong to one another. We need to shift our thinking from "How can I live faithfully with my money?" to "How can we live faithfully together?" To answer this new question, we need to confess our vulnerability and worry, redistributing what we have to ensure a different future. If asked to imagine our financial future, that vision must include housing for the homeless, health care for the sick, and freedom from debt. If I try to imagine my financial future and it doesn't include my congregation or James, I haven't imagined the kingdom of God. ■

John Thornton Jr. is a Baptist pastor in Durham, N.C.



Alingen

Desperate for a Spiritual Spring

I DON'T SET New Year's resolutions. Jan. 1 is always either too early or too late for me to predict or dream about what is new. Those seeds are planted in the fall with tulip and daffodil bulbs and cool-weather crops, or in the spring with the vegetable gardens and annuals.

Where I am in the Midwest, the church calendar is coinciding with nature. As I write this, the

down by depression and seasonal affective disorder desperately start to crawl out of the layers to find air, sun, and warmth. I am desperate for a spiritual spring.

Spring—where we literally peel away layers of wind-resistant shells, down and wool, boots, hats, gloves, and scarves—is forever around the corner. And yet the sharp, frigid air that's currently outside my home reminds me that, even though I can't stay out there for long, I am alive. It reminds me that even in this death there is hope.

The past few years have felt like a long winter for some of us. I have written many words here and elsewhere on death: the deaths of people, ideals, faith, and friendships. Too many people created in God's image have been turned into hashtags, and many of us have left communities and churches where our pursuits of justice meant that we, as well as our questions and anger, were no longer welcome. I'm still looking for a church community to call home, a community that will welcome all of me.

I have had to remind myself that winter is never forever, even when it feels like the ground will never thaw deep enough for anything to grow, let alone take root. As believers in Jesus, we must remind ourselves that we are people who believe death always gives way to life.

We are in the season of Lent, where some of us will practice fasting and self-denial, the giving of alms, repentance, and prayer. Some of us will share on social media what we are giving up, even if what we're giving up is social media. These words will be published when the temperature here in Chicago (I hope) creeps higher and higher toward a permanent thaw. I will be wondering if it's time to wash the down coats and drain the snowblower of gas.

And maybe, just maybe, for all of us our season of mourning will give way to plans and dreams. ■

*Kathy Khang is a writer, speaker, and coffee-drinker in the north suburbs of Chicago and author of **Raise Your Voice: Why We Stay Silent and How to Speak Up**.*



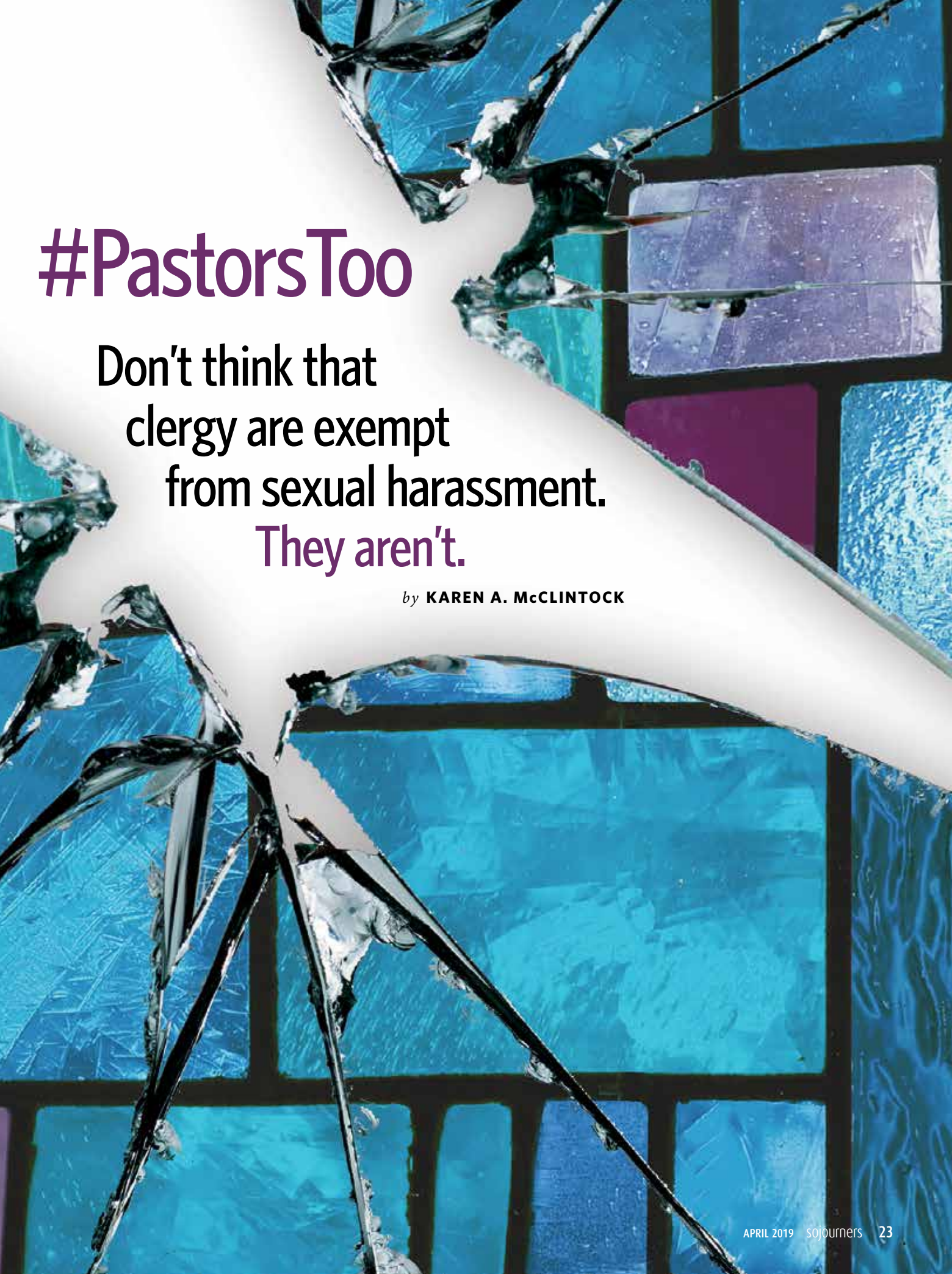
Winter is never forever, even when it feels like the ground will never thaw.

temperature is hovering just above zero degrees Fahrenheit, with wind chills dipping close to 50 below zero. People die in this sort of weather; newscasters are reminding their viewers to call loved ones and neighbors to make sure they have heat and are staying out of the elements.

While fall is my favorite season and winter contains Christmas, I need spring. It's when the roots of ferns and other perennials seemingly dead under the frozen earth, the buds on branches that have managed to stay connected to the trunk despite ice, and my heart weighed



Photo composite images: Shutterstock



#PastorsToo

Don't think that
clergy are exempt
from sexual harassment.
They aren't.

by **KAREN A. McCLINTOCK**

Fear of
harassment is
a constant
reality for
women clergy.

It began on Christmas Eve, six months after I became the senior pastor at First United Methodist Church. I had been welcomed by most people in my California Central Valley town, even though I was the first woman preacher most of them had ever met.

I entered the sanctuary robed in black, with a colorful stole around my neck (the symbol of the towel Jesus lay over his shoulders when he washed his disciples' feet). I felt confident, even on a night when many community members would be in church for the first time or had come for their once-a-year worship experience.

I lit a dozen candles on each of two standing candelabras, and red poinsettias glimmered all around me as we sang "Joy to the World." I preached a sermon from the first chapter in John's gospel that says light shines in the darkness and darkness has not overcome it. I served communion to parishioners, friends, and slightly eggnog-tipsy extended families. At midnight, we dimmed the lights and sang "Silent Night" by heart, with only the glow of hand-held candles filling the room. I blessed the congregation with raised hands, honored by the privilege in this call to the ministry I embodied, and walked to the entryway to greet everyone.

Most people came by and shook my hand but didn't linger—they had gifts to open or chores to finish for the next day. At the end of the line came a smiling, grey-haired man who was the lay leader of the church. He was in his 70s, fair-skinned, and nearly six feet tall. He took my hand and kept it beyond my comfort level. Then, as I pulled away, he gripped tighter, cupped his other hand on the top of mine, leaned closer to me, and whispered, "You look beautiful in candlelight."

The following Tuesday, after the secretary had gone home and I was leaving my office, he showed up in the hallway and said he wanted to talk with me "alone." I felt what many women call "the creep factor," so I kept walking toward my car to be in a more public area as he spoke about his loneliness and his unfulfilling marriage. I offered to meet with him in my office, during office hours (when my secretary would be on site), and to provide him with referrals to couples therapists in the area.

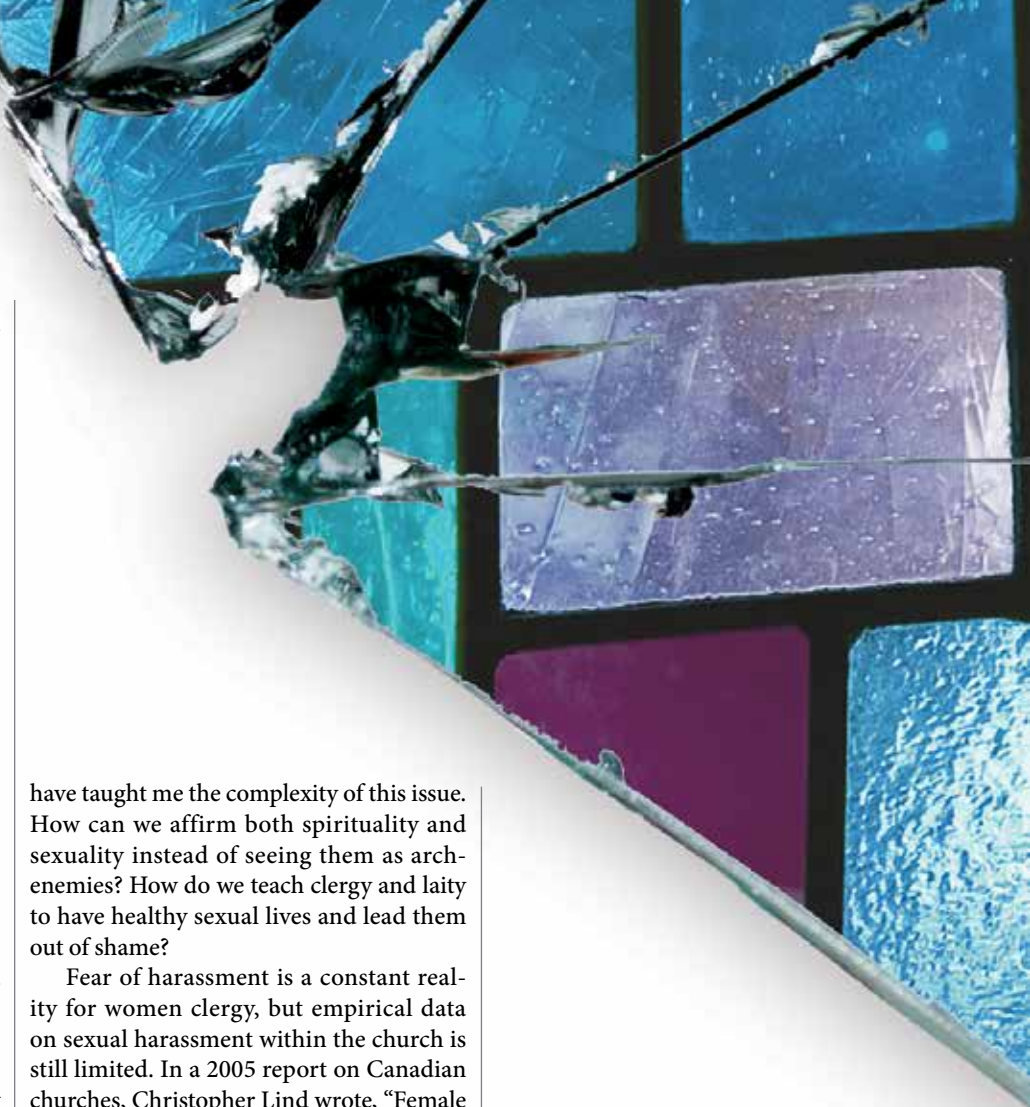
He was not deterred, and over the next few years his contacts with me progressed to phone calls begging me to come to his house while his wife was away (I didn't go), and to offering me a \$50,000 gift for a down payment on a house so I wouldn't have to live in the parsonage. I was 35, married, and the mother of a young daughter. None of that mattered to him. He professed his love obsessively.

'Don't let it get to you'

My first conversation with a male colleague about my harassment didn't go well. He minimized the man's behaviors: "He's just a jerk; don't let it get to you." He blamed me for being overly anxious. I called my supervising district superintendent in the church, who, having no understanding about the ways harassers use money to gain power, had lunch with my husband and me and said that we should take the money.

Luckily, I had others to consult. "What will he say you did for that money?" a female colleague asked. At last, someone understood. She also suggested that I get a therapist. It was now my job to deal with what was happening to me, as if it were my fault.

A few months later, I met with the man and his wife in my office to decline his offer of money, to describe his unwanted behavior, and to say that I wanted it to stop. It was humiliating for the man's wife, and she was silent and red-faced throughout the conversation. He said very little, did not acknowledge any wrongdoing, and, since he was the most powerful lay leader in the church, left the office formulating



an alternate plan. He began sowing seeds of doubt about my leadership, spreading rumors about my marriage, and making up stories describing my supposed ineptitude. He played the victim when I blocked his reelection to the honored lay leader position. My only option in the end was to ask the bishop to move me to another congregation. The man's abuse was never revealed to the congregation or to the clergyman who came after me, and while I lost a job I had otherwise loved, the man who abused me was restored to leadership.

Telling my own story

When I began working as a clergy consultant and psychologist more than two decades later, I was ready to tackle the ignorance I'd personally encountered. I participated too long in my own silent shame, the shame heaped upon other clergywomen, and the many sexual secrets churches keep. Having grown up around a shame-based family secret—my gay father spent his life in the closet—I was used to carrying shame. While keeping harassment under the proverbial rug, people in congregations say irritatingly ignorant things about offenders in their midst, such as “She must have done something to egg him on” and “He does so much good; we can certainly overlook this.”

Ready to tell my own story and to expose sexual harassment and abuse in the church for what it is, I loaded up my briefcase with handouts and traveled to all but a few states in the U.S., leading workshops for clergy

have taught me the complexity of this issue. How can we affirm both spirituality and sexuality instead of seeing them as arch-enemies? How do we teach clergy and laity to have healthy sexual lives and lead them out of shame?

Fear of harassment is a constant reality for women clergy, but empirical data on sexual harassment within the church is still limited. In a 2005 report on Canadian churches, Christopher Lind wrote, “Female pastors are concerned about protecting themselves from unwelcomed approaches. Male pastors are concerned about protecting themselves against unfair allegations.”

In 2018, I received a Lilly Endowment-funded research grant through the Louisville Institute's Pastoral Study Project. I analyzed data on the “uncomfortable silences” that remain in my United Methodist denomina-

It was now my job to deal with what was happening to me, as if it were my fault.

from multiple denominations. I have zeroed in on the problem of shame. To keep their institutions untarnished, all denominations have left victims carrying the shame that doesn't belong to them. Disowned shame by perpetrators is projected onto those who report the abuse. Sexual shame in faith traditions also distorts and represses sexuality, leading to secret-keeping. I wrote my first book, *Sexual Shame: An Urgent Call to Healing*, to explore the theological roots of sexual shame and abuse in the Christian tradition.

Clergy at thousands of my workshops

tion about sexual harassment and abuse and what is needed to directly challenge, prevent, and respond to these incidents. The levels of harassment toward women in power in congregations is remarkably similar to data reported in other workplaces that indicates that in the U.S. more than two-thirds of working women have experienced at least one type of violence against them. Research conducted for the United Methodist Church more than a decade ago showed that United Methodist clergywomen reported as high as 75 percent victimization by harassment from laity or colleagues. A 2017 study in the

UMC indicates that this rate has dropped to 58 percent for female clergy (as if this figure should give us hope!). The United Methodist General Commission on the Status and Role of Women notes, “it also appears that men are experiencing less sexual misconduct, and women are experiencing more. That, or as we may be seeing in the popular media, women are more likely to recognize and/or report it as such.”

Symptoms that can last decades

Sexual harassment is demeaning and is far more about power than about lust. Repeated comments, texts, phone calls, demands for personal favors or attention, and even stalking occur. These acts of violence against women in leadership are evident among female candidates for public office, but also in congregations that women serve. Harassment and abuse are, sadly, effective ways that people resist women's leadership.

We can and should recognize sexual harassment as trauma-inducing, especially when multiple incidents over many years threaten a person's psychological health. Clinician, researcher, and pioneer in the field of traumatic stress Bessel A. van

Power Dynamics and Sexual Ethics

Even bishops get sexually harassed—and this one is not putting up with it.

An interview with **BISHOP CYNTHIA MOORE-KOIKOI**

United Methodist Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi has fond memories of growing up in the church. It helped form and develop her as a leader, she said. But her involvement with church administration and leadership came with a price, as she described in a panel at the Religion News Association conference in 2018. As a youth delegate to her annual convention, Moore-Koikoi recalled that whenever she walked by a certain group of clergy, “they were going to make comments about my physical appearance ... I learned how to turn my face quickly when that ‘holy kiss’ was given so that it would land on my cheek not on my lips. It was like I was walking a gauntlet at times.”

In 2016, Moore-Koikoi was consecrated as a bishop and called to serve United Methodists in western Pennsylvania. Certainly, she thought, serving in such a high church position and marriage would protect her from sexual comments and predation. But, says Moore-Koikoi, “no level of power or authority in the church can insulate persons from sexual harassment.” *Sojourners’* senior associate editor Rose Marie Berger interviewed Moore-Koikoi by phone in December 2018.

Sojourners: In 2016 you were elected bishop. Have you experienced any sexualized pressure, harassment, or assault since your ordination as a bishop?

Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi: Yes. There was an incident that happened not long after I was ordained a bishop that I characterize as sexual harassment. Unfortunately, it happened at one of the earliest meetings that I went to as a bishop with the Council of Bishops. An individual there made some inappropriate comments about me, about my physical appearance and about his desires. It was a very uncomfortable situation, [my] being a new bishop, not

knowing how bishops conduct themselves at those kinds of things.

As sexual harassment often happens, it was done when I was separated from the group. There was nobody else there to witness it. Fortunately, it was in an open place, so I didn’t feel physically threatened or like I couldn’t get out of the situation. I chose to handle it by expressing to the individual that my husband would soon be joining me and that I would love to introduce my husband to him. In that way, I deflected the comments and

let him know I was not interested in engaging in any kind of behavior that he might be suggesting. I shared the experience with some of my colleagues. It was handled then by some of them also.



Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi

Why doesn’t the power or authority that one has as a bishop insulate persons from sexual harassment?

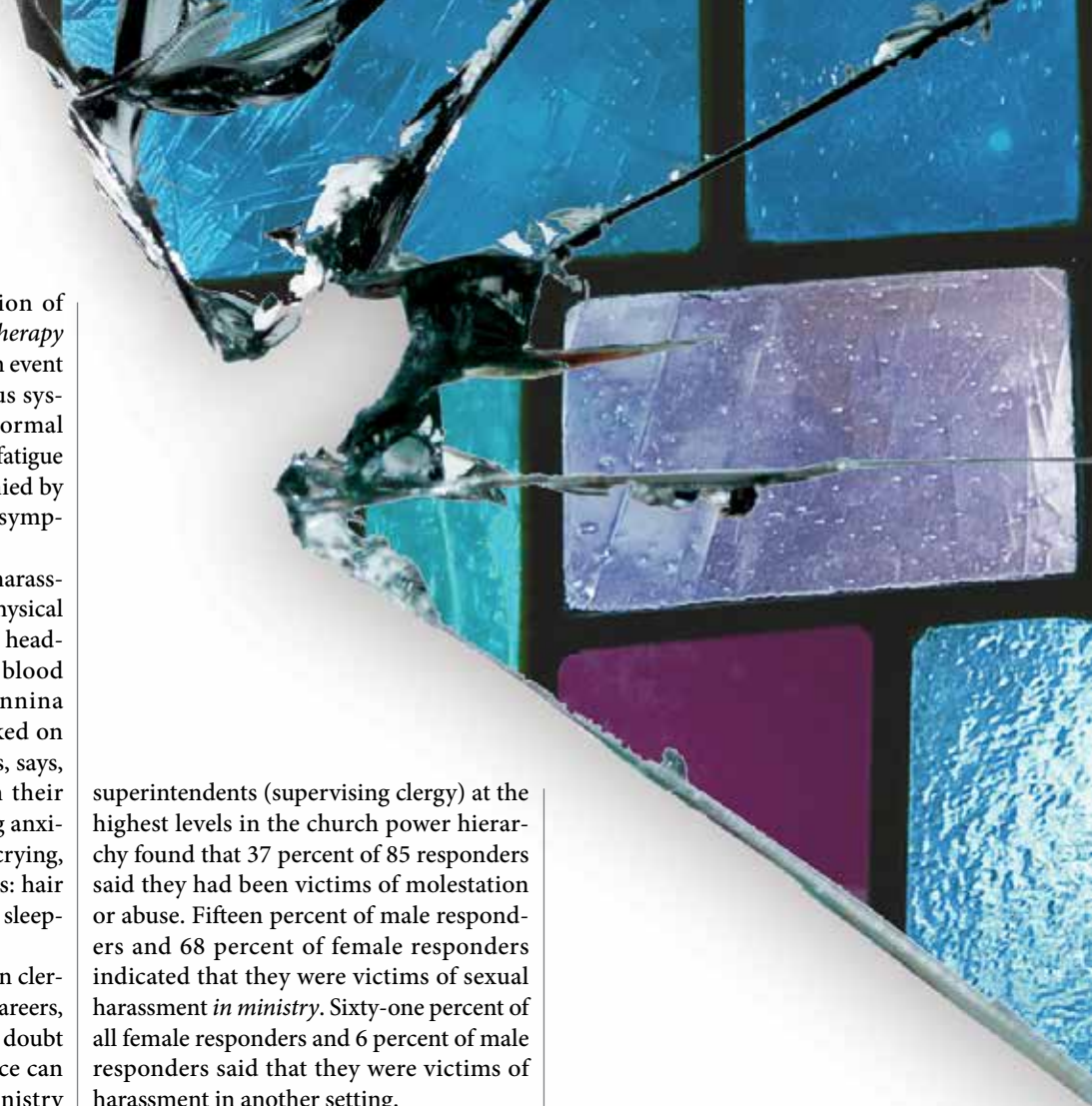
There is a different level of power that is given to a female bishop still—even in a denomination that is as inclusive, in terms of gender, as the United Methodist Church. While I have some power because of my position, because of my gender that power is diminished. Not my

ecclesial power, but my social power and social influence. The theoretical power among all my bishop colleagues, regardless of our gender, is the same. But socially and in terms of some folks’ mindset, women in ministry still lag in power. That goes on at all levels, from the bishop to the clergy and down to the local parish.

What does effectively insulate people in churches from sexual harassment?

Until we get to a place as a culture where we are able to have more healthy conversations about power dynamics and sexual ethics, we won’t be able to insulate ourselves. We can provide buffers and diminish the likelihood that sexual harassment will occur, but until we have those conversations more authentically, we will continue to have these challenges. ■

Western Pennsylvania Conference/United Methodist Church



der Kolk offers a working definition of trauma. In an interview with *Psychotherapy Networker*, he described trauma as “an event that overwhelms the central nervous system.” Repeated stressors exhaust normal coping strategies, and depression and fatigue are often the result. When accompanied by denial and minimization, physical symptoms can worsen.

Looking back, I can see that the harassment I experienced led to multiple physical symptoms. Many victims experience headaches, muscle and joint pain, high blood pressure, and other illnesses. Nannina Angioni, an attorney who has worked on hundreds of sexual harassment cases, says, “Employees talk of having a pit in their stomach commuting to work, having anxiety, panic attacks, inexplicable fits of crying, and physical manifestations of stress: hair falling out, hives, weight gain or loss, sleeplessness, and lethargy.”

Symptoms can last decades. When clergywomen are harassed early in their careers, their confidence plummets and they doubt their abilities. This lack of confidence can lead them to either drop out of ministry or say “yes” to positions with less pay and advancement.

When victims blame themselves (participating in dominant cultural myths about women and sexual abuse), they have

superintendents (supervising clergy) at the highest levels in the church power hierarchy found that 37 percent of 85 responders said they had been victims of molestation or abuse. Fifteen percent of male responders and 68 percent of female responders indicated that they were victims of sexual harassment *in ministry*. Sixty-one percent of all female responders and 6 percent of male responders said that they were victims of harassment in another setting.

Having personal experience with harassment may not incline these leaders to act. Eighty-four percent of those surveyed had never used the polity within the church to remove a lay person due to sexual harass-

includes a rarely used procedure for filing charges against a parishioner and taking away their membership. When it has been used, offenders have fought back with countersuits for defamation and slander.

On Mavis Staples’ powerful 2017 release “No Time for Crying,” she belts out the chorus: “We’ve got no time for crying. We’ve got work to do.” I’ve shed plenty of tears, but our work is far from done. Clergywomen across denominations are being harassed and abused. Because a victim may not be psychologically ready or able to speak out, we can speak out for them. Ask them their #MeToo and #ChurchToo stories. Stand in solidarity with them and listen carefully to their experience.

With national public attention turned toward abuse by clergy, we have overlooked the reality that lay members offend as well. It’s up to each of us to be sure that our sanctuaries are truly safe sanctuaries. ■

When clergywomen are harassed early in their careers, their confidence plummets.

increased shame, low self-esteem, and feelings of worthlessness. They fear job loss and loss of respect, or face blame if they report their experiences. Even clergywomen who confront their harassers, as I did, can end up losing their viability in the community or their effectiveness in ministry.

Listen and act

Is the church listening to sexual abuse victims? In the 2017 study by the United Methodist commission on women, 52 percent of female victims who reported sexual misconduct against them said they were listened to, but nearly 40 percent said their experience was minimized or dismissed.

My 2018 research in a United Methodist Church national survey of district

ment. And only 20 percent of overall responding participants said that they provide laity with harassment policies for their congregations or clergy.

Most denominations are too frightened to excommunicate laity when they perpetrate abuse. Many denominations now require clergy to take sexual ethics training at least every four years, but they have not sufficiently trained their laity. Most congregations lack even basic policies that address laity harassment. When lay persons are confronted, hostility can divide congregations into factions for decades to come. If asked to leave, offending laity can and do mount smear campaigns that undermine the viability of clergy and congregations in their communities. United Methodist polity

Karen A. McClintock, author of *When Trauma Wounds: Pathways to Healing and Hope* and four other books, is a clergy consultant and psychologist specializing in shame recovery. She lives in Ashland, Ore.





HOW RACISM WINS

**Watch the devil distract with extremity
and hyperbole • by JAY WAMSTED**

TO MOST WHITE Americans living today, racism has—until recently—managed to keep itself somewhat hidden. For decades, white people perpetuated the myth of an unbiased meritocracy, lauded laws that officially criminalized segregation and discrimination, embraced a token form of multiculturalism, and accepted a tincture of color in their overwhelmingly white world of power.

“All is well. Move along.”

When Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, the United States tipped but didn't topple. Klan Wizard David Duke ran for national office several times but never won. Two generations after the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the country elected a black president. For 40 years, if you believed you were white, you could act as though the lie of skin superiority was largely a relic of the past.

Racism and white supremacy sold the same lie the devil wants told about all manner of evil: Look at the light; there is nothing in the shadows. All is well, move along.

We know the sentiment better, perhaps, from the 1995 film *The Usual Suspects*, in which it is said, “The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn’t exist.” The poet Charles Baudelaire, however, first came to this idea in his prose poem “The Generous Gambler.” The narrator of the 1864 poem spins a tale of an evening spent with the devil. They drink and gamble, the devil wins, and the narrator loses his soul. The night ends with the narrator alone in his bed, begging God for mercy.

For a fleeting, illustrative moment, however, the devil displays weakness. He tells of the only time he felt fear: a sermon wherein a preacher enjoined his congregation to beware praise of progress and light, reminding them that the devil excels in his ability to stay hidden in the dark. The devil flinched here, it seems, though apparently without losing a single step—the preacher went unheeded.

America has long had unheeded prophets, from Frederick Douglass to Malcolm X to Ta-Nehisi Coates—voices crying in the wilderness. Tupac Shakur said, “I see no changes, all I see is racist faces. Misplaced hate makes disgrace to races.”

So long as our prophets go ignored, and we keep our eyes averted from the shadows, the devil has little to fear.

Inside my soul

The election of Barack Obama was a hinge. Although it appeared at first as proof that racism had ended long ago, it stirred enough emotion to enable some of us who believe we are white to finally see something resembling the truth. A blatantly disrespectful vein of political punditry fed a vituperative social media that burned through the stories of Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, and the Black Lives Matter movement. Then a school year began with Michael Brown, ended with Walter Scott, and had its summer vacation torn apart by Dylann Roof.

Suddenly, white Americans knew what black Americans have never been privileged enough to be able to ignore: Despite the light we see, racism persists. President Obama sang, “I once was blind but now I see,” and for a moment, the devil must have blinked, fearful that he would be found out.

He might have worried that white people finally were able to face their demons, exorcise the ghosts of America’s original sins of slavery and holocaust. Perhaps a national conversation would begin, one in which a difficult look at prejudice and implicit bias would prove powerful, engendering apology and

reparation and finally bearing the fruits of forgiveness and healing. Perhaps white supremacy would lay down its weapons and open its arms. Perhaps black Americans would finally have reason to trust their white siblings.

Instead, we got the so-called “alt-right.”

It appears that we are in a new phase of racism in America, one in which these vocal white nationalists and their attendants serve as a sort of inoculation. Yes, the racial politics played out over the past decade have caused a perturbation: Racism today can no longer hide like Baudelaire’s devil. Those who call themselves the

alt-right, however, serve as a cartoonish diversion from the larger evil at hand. White people see these vestigial descendants of the Klan marching with their Confederate flags and Nazi tattoos and stage a collective sigh of relief.

“This is what racism looks like,” we say to ourselves. “Racism screams at people of color in the streets. It bullies and threatens, trolls and tweets. I do none of these things.”

And the devil whispers: “Therefore, you cannot be racist.”

Who could believe in a personal devil when the notion causes most of us to imagine silly Halloween costumes or a frantic Bugs Bunny arguing with his conscience? Similarly, what logical person could be incriminated in the story of racism when, at the word, most of us picture monsters marching in the streets, holding high their symbols of hate? Let just a moment of suspicion sneak in—“Maybe this story has something to do with me”—and watch the devil distract with extremity and hyperbole.

Take Dylann Roof. He might have been the final straw for white people, his outrageous acts causing scales to fall from our eyes and allowing us to see, finally, that racism still pervades our world. And yet he also provides an easy way out of introspection and self-recrimination. “This is what a real racist looks like,” we think, “this silly man with his manifestos and semiautomatic weapons. He might as well be wearing red tights for all he has to do with me. I cannot believe that anything remotely like him resides inside my soul. He is the lunatic fringe: He could never be me.”

This is how racism wins.

A lifelong project

We must learn to see racism not just in the ways that are so highly visible, like white nationalists on the march, but in our own day-to-day lives.

I am white and teach at a high school in southwest Atlanta that is 98 percent black. I have been there for almost 14 years now, during which I have read hundreds of books on race and racism, earned a doctorate on race

**Racism is out there,
the devil says, but
that’s not you.**

in the public schools, and published articles and essays especially focused on black students and white teachers. Throughout this time—which entirely encompasses the Obama era and the spurious idea of post-racism—I have had countless conversations with white people, too many of which ended similarly. They told me that the problem in America is no longer about race; rather, it's about class. All we have to do is fix poverty and we'll see that prejudice will end.

Like the siren's song, this sentence is appealing, but wrong. Racism is inextricably intertwined with class, as blacks are close to three times more likely to live in poverty than whites. Racism is also confounded with employment and educational and health outcomes—all areas where blacks significantly lag whites for reasons that are not statistically explained by differences in income. The mere fact that my school exists—an almost all-black school in an almost all-black part of town that's beset by poverty and lagging academically—is evidence of the racism that pervades our country. As Kanye West once said: “The devil is alive, I can feel him breathin’.”

If we're honest, racism is woven into the lives of most white people. Because, on the whole, if one is white, then one lives next to white people, socializes with white people, is related to white people, worships alongside white people. If one is white, then one has limited opportunities to process the racism one might feel during that horrible moment in a public place when a reaction to a black stranger will dredge up all sorts of prejudice and stereotype.

I am pretty sure most white people have these moments, because they still happen to me sometimes—this after years of deliberate scholarship, countless conversations, and an almost all-black senior class who voted me “Favorite Teacher” last year. Negotiating otherness is difficult work because it is, by definition, about difference. I have come to realize that it might be a life-long project for those of us taught to believe we are white.

The devil wants us to not worry about any of these things, structural or personal. “Racism is out there,” he says, “but that's not you.” Instead, he lurks behind us—listen to him breathing—and tries to focus our attention on Dylann Roof and public events featuring white supremacists and neo-Nazis. These kinds of racists are worthy of attention, of course, but when we turn our eyes too far toward the extreme edge, we let racism win. Because so long as the structures of inequity prevail—inequities of education, health, employment, wealth etc.—and we believe that racism only operates on the crazy margins, in the screamers and the trolls, so long as we think we have nothing to do with the system of white supremacy that lurks in the minds of white people like a symbiotic virus, benefitting us even as it



sickens, so long as we keep our heads low and soldier on: Racism wins.

How racism loses

Racism loses when we look it straight in the face. When we flinch at the black stranger and, instead of comforting ourselves by imagining vast distance between us and the nature of Nazis, turn and rebuke ourselves: “Get behind me, Satan!” Call that thought out for what it is: racism—the belief that black skin is inferior to white. Say, “I didn’t mean to react that way, but I did. That is prejudice, and I can defeat it only by calling it out by name.”

It loses when we repent. Maybe to a friend or in the privacy of our prayers. Maybe to the human being we wronged by believing ourselves better.

It loses when we wake up tomorrow and try to do it all over again.

We must not let Dylann Roof, Nazi tattoos, Confederate flags, or blackface yearbook photos convince us that this story has nothing to do with us. We must not believe the lie that a nation predicated on centuries of chattel slavery has healed itself magically in the space of two generations. We must not continue to tell ourselves that the devil of racism is nothing more than a cartoon, a halting vestige of what he once was, an impotent fool in red tights.

Look for the devil in the shadows, not on Twitter or television. Look inside your mind, under the structures of your mostly white spaces of safety. Look behind you and listen for his breathing.

Otherwise, racism wins. ■

Jay Wamsted is a high school math teacher in southwest Atlanta. He writes about race and is working on a book about school segregation and the legacy of Jim Crow education.

A nation predicated on centuries of chattel slavery has not healed itself in the space of two generations.

Madame Jazz vs. Madame Guillotine

IRISH POET Patrick Kavanagh famously said, “Any poet worth his salt is a theologian.”

In *The Five Quintets*, a poetic tour de force by Micheal O’Siadhail, Kavanagh’s quip is flavorfully borne out. *Quintets* offers a sustained reflection on Western modernity (and its yet unnamed aftermath) in the vein of *The Divine Comedy*, Dante’s sustained reflection on medieval Europe (and its aftermath, the Renaissance).

O’Siadhail (pronounced O’Sheel) inspects 400 years of Anglo-Atlantic culture—artistic creativity, economics, politics, science, and “the search for meaning”—with the skillful hand of a citizen-poet, refracted through an Irish Catholic soul. Dublin born and educated, now poet in residence at Union Theological Seminary in New York, O’Siadhail embodies the vatic tradition of the Hibernian Gael—poet, prophet, priest, and, at times, jester.

His blind guide for the modern era is Madame Jazz—who encompasses klezmer from the Jewish shtetls and céilí music from famine Ireland as well. Jazz is the consummation of all that is truly human, the best of our polyphonic harmonies, a wild, joyful freedom born of shared

from Luther and Wesley to Hannah Arendt and Jean Vanier. All conducted in conscientious poetic forms and meter, including haiku and sonnet, iambic pentameter and terza rima.

At first O’Siadhail’s exploration in European classicism seems out of tune with the present need to decenter a Eurocentric ideal. He cross-examines the personalities and intellectual suppositions that shape the white, Christian, capitalist, patriarchal distortions that remain in place today—though mercifully met with great dissent. The reader must determine whether the nods to women, people of color, and empires in China, Japan, Persia, and southern Africa reflect only the secondary roles of the time or perpetuate that subordination.

WHY ALL THIS poetic digging through history? “No one agrees on what to call our current era,” writes O’Siadhail. But all agree that “some kind of change in our mood and attitude has occurred. Perhaps the hallmark is radical questioning of overarching certainties. The upside of this is a respect for what Jonathan Sacks calls ‘the dignity of difference.’ The downside is the danger of excessive irony and meaninglessness.”

T.S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets* shipwrecked us on this downside, a circular cage, when he closes with: “A people without history / Is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern / Of timeless moments.” O’Siadhail offers a fifth canto where heaven



Irish poet
Micheal O’Siadhail

Julia Hembree Smith

and wholeness are attained and Madame Jazz reigns supreme. But the poet hesitates at heaven’s gate: “What business have I here / among the saints?” A glimpse of his wife’s smile in mid-morning light gives him courage to “dare / the company of saints, whose days of grace / across all time invisibly repair / whatever peccadilloes wound our pride / and seal the cracks in brittle earthenware.” She and Mother Mary introduce him to the “shining faces at the feast,” who “like sacred lanterns [are] glowing from inside.” Through saints, the poet learns to dance, be-bop, sway, “a daily choreography of praise.”

With penitential gaze, the long Lent of modernity is reviewed, which includes the “will to power” by those beyond morality as well as the death of God. And though not certain and not in every case, an ecstatic wholeness is achieved that relies utterly on forgiveness, love, humility, and grace. ■

Rose Marie Berger, senior associate editor of *Sojourners* and author of *Bending the Arch: Poems (2019)*, is a Catholic peace activist and poet.



‘What business have I here among the saints?’

suffering. Her chilling counterpoint, who ends the age of monarchs, is Madame Guillotine, whose shadow reaches forward into our War on Terror.

With these as guides, O’Siadhail noses through the personal and public lives of modern-era influencers: in the arts, Cervantes to Brian Friel; in economics, Adam Smith to Kathryn Tanner; in politics, Louis XIV to Nelson Mandela; in science, from centering the sun to gene editing; and in religion and philosophy,



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By Jennifer Ochstein

A Theology of Hospitality

Mrs. Dalloway is a manual on kindness in the face of war and moral injury.

.....
AS AN OUTSIDER, Virginia Woolf eschewed labels that attempted to relegate her to tidy boxes. The label “feminist” should die, the British novelist wrote in *Three Guineas*, an essay published in 1938 that married equal opportunities and pay for women with how a society might prevent fascism and war.

Likewise, despite her disdain for war, she would not claim herself a “pacifist.” The only label she allowed for herself was “outsider,” and perhaps because of that, many of her novels are concerned with outsiders. But it wasn’t just outsider status that fascinated her: It was the way patriarchal structures punished outsiders for failing to conform to and live within their confines, most notably those associated with war.

Woolf’s intellectual and social concerns form the subtext of many of her novels. While Woolf’s 1925 novel *Mrs. Dalloway* has not traditionally been labeled an anti-war novel, it reveals a rich theology of hospitality, an antidote to war and the moral injury that results from the ways that war wastes human life. Outsiders hold the key to this theology in the way they form their peculiar values despite the patriarchal structure’s insistence that they are frivolous, cowardly, or only after personal gain.

A kind of liturgy

The novel’s protagonist, Clarissa Dalloway, is accused by some characters of being a snob and throwing parties to benefit her husband Richard’s career. Other characters condemn her as

Composite photo Shutterstock/George Charles Beresford



Author
Virginia
Woolf

Inside CultureWatch

40 The Stories That Unite Us

Jon Little on
The Seventh Story

41 Christians Who Failed to Act

Anne Colamosca reviews
The Color of Compromise

42 Healing from Empire

Brandon Wrencher reviews
A Riff of Love

Clarissa creates a theology of hospitality that is sacramental in nature.

The other, more obvious, outsider that Woolf explores within the novel is the World War I veteran Septimus Smith. He not only suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder but also from moral injury. While notions surrounding PTSD were not fully formed in this era after World War I, when doctors referred to it as “shell shock,” Woolf’s sense of the ways war atrocities could shatter a person’s connection to their very personhood seems to have anticipated today’s understanding of moral injury.

A society that values war

First defined near the turn of the 21st century, moral injury suggests that certain acts committed by a soldier under orders, acts the soldier failed to thwart, or betrayals of the stated purpose of war can be so morally egregious to the soldier that they defy the very underpinnings of their deeply held beliefs and sense of self. This can cause irreparable psychological harm. While Clarissa’s outsider status did not bar her from participating in her society at large, Septimus’ did. Woolf writes that Septimus insists that he “had committed an appalling crime and been condemned to death by human nature.”

According to his doctor, Sir William Bradshaw, Septimus had lost all sense of “proportion.” Proportion is Bradshaw’s articulation of the indelible requirement of those living in civilized patriarchal soci-

Clarissa’s parties are a kind of liturgy—and an offering of the gift of life itself.

ety, a requirement that equates to upholding authority and acquiescing to one’s responsibilities within that society, no matter what. This includes those who, in service of the patriarchal value of war, do what society asks of them and fight, but upon return cannot figure out a way back into the society.

Lurking beneath Bradshaw’s philosophy of proportion is a “goddess of conversion” at whose altar he, perhaps unknowingly,

Continued on Page 39

New & Noteworthy



duendita

Jesus on Line One

Afro-Latinx artist duendita’s EP *direct line to My Creator* confronts faith, doubt, and police violence against women of color in a powerful, prayerful debut. Fusing R&B, jazz, and soul, duendita conveys a striking range of emotion through rich, fluid vocals and ambient instrumentals. duendita.bandcamp.com

Spears into Pruning Hooks

Beating Guns: Hope for People Who Are Weary of Violence offers creative, Christ-centered responses to gun violence. Activist Shane Claiborne and Mennonite pastor-turned-blacksmith Michael Martin engage readers by interspersing the theology, history, and politics of guns with scripture, photos, quotes, and memorials to gun-violence victims. Brazos Press

War on Black People

In *Money Rock: A Family’s Story of Cocaine, Race, and Ambition in the New South*, Pam Kelley—a journalist who contributed to an exposé on housing inequality that was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service—tells another powerful story of injustice. The New Press

Show Hospitality

As President Trump argues for a border wall, stories of why people emigrate get overlooked. *We Are Not Refugees: True Stories of the Displaced*, by Agus Morales, presents harrowing stories of refugees driven away by violence from their homes in Central America, Pakistan, Syria, and other locations. Imagine

a frivolous woman, categorizing her parties as trivial. Clarissa considers the real reasons for her desire to throw parties and has a difficult time articulating them, even to herself.

Woolf writes: “[W]hat did it mean to [Clarissa], this thing she called life? Oh it was very queer. Here was So-and-So in South Kensington; someone up in Bayswater; and somebody else, say, in Mayfair. And she felt quite continuously a sense of their existence; and she felt what a waste; and she felt what a pity; and she felt if only they could be brought together; so she did it. And it was an offering; to combine, to create; but to whom? An offering for the sake of offering, perhaps. Anyhow, it was her gift.”

This is partly what makes Clarissa an outsider, that her parties are offerings to life, this strange thing she loves. Her gift as a hostess allows her to preside over her parties the way a clergy person might preside over communion. They are a kind of liturgy, a participation in common celebration and an offering of the gift of life itself. In this,



Jeff, featured in the Netflix documentary *Recovery Boys*.

Learning How to Live Life (on Life's Terms)

A FEW YEARS AGO, I was sitting in a McDonald's, getting some work done during my son's orchestra practice, when I looked up and saw an ambulance parked on the sidewalk outside, a team of EMTs at work on a man at one of the patio tables. I pulled out my earbuds just in time to hear the McDonald's worker behind the counter say, in an exasperated tone, "I don't know why they have to come here to shoot their dope."

The man was being revived from a heroin overdose, but life was going on around him as though his situa-

dike, struggling to hold back the overdose deluge.

Now *Recovery Boys*, Sheldon's first feature-length film, also for Netflix, returns to West Virginia to follow four young men through the arduous journey of addiction recovery. The men are clients at Jacob's Ladder, an unusual six-month, private residential program started by a doctor whose son was an addict. On a remote mountain farm, the men at Jacob's Ladder spend their days tending the animals and baling hay, with regular breaks for meditation, 12-step meetings,

wasn't spending much time in the real world."

At the end of *Recovery Boys*, two of the guys are definitely getting the program. One definitely has not. The fourth is getting by on Suboxone, a milder synthetic opioid that's being promoted for addiction treatment. It prevents withdrawal symptoms, keeps people from overdosing, and allows the addict to hold a job.

But many in the 12-step programs argue that the person in "medically assisted treatment" is short-circuiting the painful process of learning to live life on life's terms.

People whose method of coping with life has been to escape it have to learn, almost from scratch, how to live. And no matter what the insurance companies say, you can't do that in 28 days: It's a long, hard, and essentially spiritual process.

But when you've seen it happen, as you do in *Recovery Boys*, it gets a lot easier to say that line in the Nicene Creed about the "resurrection of the dead." ■

Danny Duncan Collum teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort. He is the author of the novel *White Boy*.

"I just wasn't spending much time in the real world."

tion was a routine occurrence. That's because here in Kentucky, it is.

It's even more routine in Huntington, W.Va., a city known as the overdose capital of America, with a rate twice the national average. In 2017, Huntington was the setting for a prize-winning Netflix documentary, *Heroin(e)*, by West Virginia filmmaker Elaine McMillion Sheldon, which profiled three women—a fire chief, a drug court judge, and a Christian volunteer—who had their fingers in the

group therapy, and recovery classes.

The isolated setting and structured schedule allow the men to slowly re-enter the land of the living. We see one of them sitting outdoors on a spring morning, awestruck at the symphony of birdsong around him. In a group session, one of the men says, "When I was high, I thought that love was just a construct. Something people said to get what they wanted. Now I see that love really exists. ... I just



Continued from Page 37

worships. He believes that people can be molded to fit and obey the established order. This goddess might well be called the goddess of war as she “is even now engaged in dashing down shrines, smashing idols, and setting up in their place her own stern countenance,” Woolf writes. This goddess camouflages herself behind “love, duty, self-sacrifice.”

When a person recognizes the goddess for what she really is—violence—and loses his or her sense of proportion, Bradshaw insists that the person be shut away from the larger society to rest and regain that sense. Ultimately, Bradshaw determines that Septimus should be sent to a home with other shell-shocked veterans. Those deemed out of proportion should not be heeded or considered, only fixed.

Unable to stand against Bradshaw’s attempt to force proportion on him, Septimus commits suicide. He could never submit himself to the prescribed remedy, reflecting, “Once you fall ... human nature is on you. Holmes and Bradshaw are on you. They scour the desert. They fly screaming into the wilderness. The rack and the thumbscrew are applied. Human nature is remorseless.”

Dr. Holmes, who treated Septimus before Bradshaw, sees Septimus’ suicide as proof that he is a coward, the most damning critique of a man in a patriarchal society that values war. It implies that Septimus did not have the fortitude to carry out his God-given responsibilities to his family or society. To Dr. Holmes, a representation of the unreflective blindness of patriarchal obedience, Septimus was a lost cause, a moral reprobate incapable of even the minimum duties required of him—which equate to simply pulling himself together. After all, according to Holmes, there was nothing wrong with Septimus except a bad case of the nerves.

A way to suppress war

Reading Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* today and considering the hospitality ethic in the novel reveals how the private life and its values can offer a theology of hospitality, a kind of antidote to patriarchal structures that value war and warmongering. Those conversant in the virtues of private life, such as hospitality, as opposed to the values associated with patriarchal public life—competition, jealousy, grabbing positions of power and holding



From *The King*

ROLLING WITH THE KING

THERE ARE moments in *The King*—Eugene Jarecki’s ambitious movie about how the rise and decline of Elvis Presley is a metaphor for America—when the film feels like a prophetic lament. Striking widescreen photography frames an original idea: taking the Rolls Royce that Elvis owned on a nationwide road trip, picking up hitchhikers and celebrities alike to talk about what went wrong.

Parts of it are brilliant: Chuck D lamenting how Elvis appropriated black music and ended up being coronated while “Big Mama” Thornton (for whom Leiber and Stoller wrote “Hound Dog”) remained a marginal figure; John Hiatt gently weeping in the back of the Rolls, his heart heavy at how Elvis “was so trapped”; the housekeeper who found Elvis half-dead on the toilet, and the women who live in one of his early homes, briefly centering the stark contrast between a 20th-century king and 21st-century poverty.

It’s brave and imaginative to include footage of Jarecki’s interviewees criticizing him and the film itself. *The Wire* creator David Simon says it would have been better to use one of Elvis’ Cadillacs—a more apt metaphor for American decline than the car of a British aristocrat. More challenging is Van Jones asking why Jarecki seems to defend a man who took the music of descendants of enslaved people, accrued

enormous power for himself, and didn’t speak up when the nation needed public figures to support civil rights.

However, Jarecki also includes less insightful interviews. There’s no need to have Ashton Kutcher and Alec Baldwin in the car to talk about how difficult it is to be a celebrity: I’d rather hear more from the hitchhiker, friend, fan, or housekeeper.

And when Jarecki tries to make a point about religious manipulation, he uses a montage of four images: a Scientology logo, a faith healer, Billy Graham, and Charles Manson. There’s an especially American ill-health about the way public charisma can trick people into seeing selfishness as a virtue, but it’s at worst fundamentally distorted to link Graham with Manson, just because they both had charisma and followers.

The King doesn’t imagine a way out of the mess we’re in, and it doesn’t have to. But it paints a picture that implies there is no hope possible. In that sense, although the film’s narrative is told well, it’s half the story and should be handled with care. Its image of America may be bleak enough to stimulate despair, but not whole enough to provoke change. ■

Gareth Higgins is an Irish writer and founder of moviesandmeaning.com and irelandretreats.com.

on to them—subvert war culture with little fanfare.

Woolf argues as much in *Three Guineas*. She suggests that the cultivation of private virtues of poverty, chastity, derision (to counteract fame), and “freedom from unreal loyalties” can counteract public patriarchal values. She might as well have included in her list of virtues the hospitality ethic practiced by Clarissa Dalloway.

Private virtues practiced publicly become the overarching values of the society rather than being relegated only to home. While this might seem idealistic and simple, the response of those opposed to the public practice of hospitality should remind us that practicing private virtues as offerings for the love of life and our common humanity will often draw public ire rather than admiration. Because we are steeped in the values of public life that revolve around the maintenance of power, private virtues that publicly subvert power are judged harshly, seen as unrealistic or frivolous, and rejected as cowardly. They are only considered valuable in private.

Clarissa’s ultimate act of hospitality has little to do with party planning, but it’s cultivated by her love of life. When she learns of Septimus’ suicide, Clarissa steals away from her party. She creates physical distance from the public who derided her for her parties. She doesn’t judge the outsider Septimus for his inability to regain proportion. As she reflects on Septimus’ death, she realizes the suffering required for her to benefit from values that send people to war: “Somehow it was her disaster—her disgrace. It was her punishment to see sink and disappear here a man, there a woman, in this profound darkness ... She had schemed; she had pilfered. She was never wholly admirable. She had wanted success.”

Clarissa acknowledges her complicity in the values that caused Septimus to commit suicide. In this admission we see the ways that the practice of hospitality can shape us toward empathy and compassion. By first acknowledging our complicity, we might better practice the virtues we’ve cultivated that, without flourish, suppress war. ■

Jennifer Ochstein is a Midwestern writer and professor. Her reviews, essays, and poetry have appeared in America magazine, Brevity, and other publications.

Reviewed by Jon Little

THE STORIES THAT UNITE US

The Seventh Story: Us, Them, and the End of Violence (e-book) and *Cory and the Seventh Story*, by Gareth Higgins and Brian D. McLaren (illustrated by Heather Lynn Harris). theseventhstory.com.

STORIES ARE more than mere entertainment: They rest at the heart of who we are. They shape our understanding of the world and how we choose to live in it, both individually and collectively. They can sever us from one another or call us into deeper communion. This is the message at the center of two new books by Gareth Higgins (a *Sojourners* columnist) and Brian D. McLaren (a *Sojourners* contributing editor).

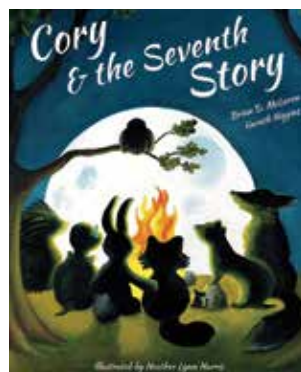
In *The Seventh Story: Us, Them, and the End of Violence*, Higgins and McLaren suggest that the violence and division that is part of our past and present are neither inevitable nor coincidental. They’re part and parcel of the stories we live by. The authors highlight six story types that are particularly pernicious and all too common: stories of domination, revenge,

escapist isolationism, scapegoating, acquisition, and victimization.

Drawing on what theologian Walter Wink calls “the myth of redemptive violence,” Higgins looks at the role these story types play in justifying and perpetuating violence. He reminds us that, as was the case in his native Ireland, it is the work of peace and

reconciliation—not more violence—that is truly redemptive.

For his part, McLaren explores French anthropologist René Girard’s theories of violence. His discussion of Girard’s idea that desire and rivalry culminate in sacrifice and scapegoating provides an interesting lens through which to consider humanity’s tendency toward violence, as well as our current president’s willingness to demonize marginalized groups for political gain.



A story-loving raccoon confronts the myth of redemptive violence in *Cory and the Seventh Story*.

In *Cory and the Seventh Story*, the authors bring these outdated story types to life in an intriguing picture book for children. Centered on Cory, a story-loving raccoon, and the once idyllic Old Village in which he lives, the book opens with Badger attacking Fox and taking control of the Old Village. Neighbor soon turns against neighbor, and, as they do in our current political climate, division and anger rule the day.

Living in perpetual fear, the villagers rally their wagons into ever smaller circles. Some flee for greener pastures. Some plot to overthrow Badger's despotic rule. Others project their fear onto their furless neighbors, blaming Frog and Lizard for all the village's ills. When all these responses fail, the villagers turn even further inward, clinging to no more than the shiny objects they've acquired, hoping that their material gains will, if not save the village, at least provide some kind of individual salvation.

Just when Cory thinks all is lost, a stranger appears in the Old Village, offering a different story—the seventh story—and with it a way forward.

In Higgins and McLaren's typology, seventh stories are unique. They suggest a way of reconciliation and love that acknowledges our fundamental interdependence. The authors are quick to point out that, for all their uniqueness, seventh stories are not

new. The story of Jesus is a seventh story, as are the stories of all the great spiritual leaders who have shown us that there is no "us" and "them," only "we."

In a nation led by an avowed nationalist whose preferred symbol is a wall, stories of love and reconciliation are rarer and more essential than ever before. We must share them, savor them, and ultimately learn to live in their light. ■

Jon Little is a freelance writer in Nashville, Tenn. He writes about mindfulness, fatherhood, and faith at mindfuldaddy.com.

Reviewed by Anne Colamosca

CHRISTIANS WHO FAILED TO ACT

The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism, by Jemar Tisby. Zondervan.

A HAUNTING, emotionally charged, fact-based narrative, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism* covers 400 years of American civil rights history. It is a withering look at the role white Protestant churches played in reinforcing institutional support of slavery and racism. Its main thesis is that moderate Christians have had the clout to rebut racism but have an abysmal record of doing so. This story is woven from a survey of biographies, memoirs, classics of history, and serious journalistic research.

White moderates, Jemar Tisby demonstrates, time and again mouthed sympathetic clichés toward the black community but inevitably supported the status quo. Probably the most iconic example Tisby gives is that of Billy Graham, one of the most prominent Protestant figures of the 1950s and 1960s.

Graham talked a good game: He publicly removed ropes segregating black churchgoers at his massive rallies. But despite these "positive" optics, Graham never participated in civil rights demonstrations. He instead insisted that civil rights was a local matter. He railed against communism, feeding into the term's use as coded language that marked "subversive" U.S. political activity as evidence of Soviet influence. When the Watts riot broke out in Los Angeles, Graham quickly declared that "rioting, looting, and crime ... have reached the point of anarchy," while failing to explain the profound issues that caused the rebellion.

Graham, with his national popularity, could have had a huge impact on civil rights, but failed to do so.

He followed a pattern that was created



Jemar Tisby shines a light on Christians who had the power to change race relations in the U.S. but didn't.

early on by Protestant leaders. Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians all initially prohibited slave ownership, but by the mid-19th century, all three Protestant denominations had split, with the Southern church entities accepting slave ownership. In 1850, Congress passed the draconian Fugitive Slave Act, allowing the federal government to arrest and return runaway slaves. Throughout the country, many people risked their lives to fight this hated law but often without the then-substantial power and influence of Protestant institutions.

Yet, almost 70 years later, with wounds of the Civil War still lingering, high-profile Presbyterian

President Woodrow Wilson resegregated the federal civil service. Scapegoating of Jews and Catholics, along with blacks, gave rise to a huge resurgence in the Ku Klux Klan (this time in the North as well). Tisby's research shows that an estimated 40,000 Protestant ministers were members of the Klan.

Ten years later, under President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, Southern Protestant senators chairing key committees found ways to exclude black people from important legislation, such as the 65 percent of African Americans excluded at the time from Social Security benefits because they were maids and farmworkers.

Tisby, who is working on a doctorate in history at the University of Mississippi, has written for *The New York Times* and *The Atlantic* and runs the popular website *The Witness: A Black Christian Collective* (thewitnessbcc.com). Filled with powerful prose, his debut book shines a light on Christians who had the power to change the history of race relations in the U.S. but

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didn't want to risk creating a breach between themselves and their religious constituencies. If other Christians continue to follow their example, this country will face many more dire challenges. ■

Anne Colamosca is a former staff writer at Business Week and has written for many national magazines and newspapers.

Reviewed by Brandon Wrencher

HEALING FROM EMPIRE

***A Riff of Love: Notes on Community and Belonging*, by Greg Jarrell. Cascade Books.**

BLACK AND BROWN folks have discussed at great length white supremacy and empire, but unless white folks have the conversation, those demons will never be fully cast out of our lives. White folks have become content with a lifestyle that hovers above black and brown folks and doesn't dive into the white supremacy and empire that threatens them.

But Greg Jarrell, author of *A Riff of Love: Notes on Community and Belonging* and a self-described "white, middle-class, highly educated, straight man," departs from this pattern. Jarrell plunges into the issues, examining the story of his family's more-than-a-decade-long journey of building QC Family Tree, an antiracist spiritual community of people in solidarity with black folks experiencing gentrification and displacement in the Enderly Park neighborhood of Charlotte, N.C.

Jarrell, who plays saxophone, frames the book around the concept of riffs, which he describes as "a few notes ... the essence of the full melody, the foundation from which a whole work is constructed." Some of the greatest jazz arrangements begin with a riff, born of careful attention to a melody and improvisation on a theme.

One of Jarrell's reasons for writing *A Riff of Love* is to make his audience better excavators of their places and souls so they too can discover riffs that may appear to be deficits but are actually pregnant with possibility and abundance. This type of prophetic imagination can bring liberation

from white supremacy and empire and deliver us into the way of Christ.

Jarrell's writing style is smooth, poetic, jazz-like: His words roll off the page. This is not easy reading topically, though. There is nothing easy about grappling with white supremacy and empire inside of a search for community and belonging. I certainly found myself needing to step away at times from Jarrell's book to lament, cry, rejoice, and meditate.

Because *A Riff of Love* is poetry and not treatise, its readers will likely find themselves able to cope with the difficult truths it presents, as the rhythm and rhyme of Jarrell's tales draw them in. You'll find in the pages of Jarrell's authentic narrative humor, great quotes, and no shortage of critical race theory.

But Jarrell's storytelling is the real draw. Pulling together scripture, theology, history, music and literary theory, and the lives

***A Riff of Love* is a memoir about exchanging white supremacy for abundant community.**

of his relatives and neighbors—young and old, black and white—Jarrell tells a story of radical discipleship, a story of following Jesus. He writes to an ethnically diverse audience of people seeking the good of their neighborhoods.

But, ultimately, the intended focus of Jarrell's book is white folks like him, and rightfully so. *A Riff of Love* is nothing less than a spiritual autobiography of whiteness, a memoir about healing from white supremacy and empire and exchanging it for abundant community. Such a work of art is rare. I strongly recommend *A Riff of Love* to all who seek a better world and want to start building it in their neighborhoods—especially folks of European descent who must find liberation from whiteness to fully immerse themselves in the movement for social justice. ■

Brandon Wrencher is a provisional elder in the Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church. He has written for *The Other Journal*, *Missio Alliance*, and other publications.



Visitation

In deep thirst, a desert stag will tear
open saguaro ribs with his teeth
and gorge on succulent heart, living sap.

This morning desire and grief for You
are the same ache. Welcome, hurt.
Enter and feast on my flesh. Become love.

Longing for flowing streams, You
nuzzle my chest. Your kiss drinks, devours
my core wound, now boundless well,

where Your power overshadows me.

A.M. Lawrence is a contemplative spiritual director and an education researcher at the University of South Florida.

Painting, "Abstraction Dark Green Lines with Red and Pink,"
by Georgia O'Keeffe © Georgia O'Keeffe Museum

God Exceeds through Excess

THE SENSE OF SMELL is intimately enmeshed with memory centers in our brains. Humanity's experience of the evocative power of scent is not fanciful. The bereaved hang on to their loved one's clothes, to inhale their unique scent, to flood themselves with recollection.

As we celebrate Holy Week, we can evoke the memories created by Mary of Bethany when she anointed Jesus with luxurious nard, six days before his final Passover. "The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume," we will read in John 12. Her lavish gesture, wasting this fabulously expensive Indian cosmetic, was to be ever linked with the excessiveness, the far-too-muchness, of Jesus' own willingness to throw his life away on the cross. The theme of excess is taken up in John's pointed note about the vast quantity of spices—a hundred pounds!—lavished on Jesus' corpse before burial. When the disciples entered the empty tomb at dawn, the gorgeous aroma must have been overpowering. Perhaps the reluctance of so many to accept the empty tomb and the implications of the apostles' testimony is related to a reductionist instinct, a recoil from divine excess. Judas was disgusted

by Mary's excess—and there are those who think that the bodily resurrection is incredible because it is over the top. Surely, they say, the *idea* of the exaltation of Jesus' *spirit*, the resurrection as strictly metaphorical, seems more than satisfactory without anything actually happening to his corpse! But God exceeds through excess.



Martin L. Smith, an Episcopal priest, is an author, preacher, and retreat leader. He lives in Washington, D.C.

[APRIL 7]

Paul's Pile of Poop

Isaiah 43:16-21; Psalm 126; Philippians 3:4b-14; John 12:1-8

"**BY THE LITTLE** which now satisfies Spirit, we can measure the extent of its loss," writes German philosopher Georg Hegel. A sobering thought. We shake our heads over the dependence of so many on off-the-shelf, fabricated identities that society offers, the branded clothes and consumer goods, without which we are made to seem nobodies. Competing ideologies of left and right offer identities with ready-packaged prejudices and stances: Those who refuse to buy into one or the other must then be nonentities. Perhaps this issue of identity is the key to a fresh discovery of the meaning of *metanoia*, repentance.

Writing to the Philippians, Paul lists the unearned privileges and accumulated credentials that he once counted on to be a man who "has it all." His being "crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2:20) and his encounter with Jesus as the Risen One compel him to cut loose from all this. What Paul once counted on for an identity, he now regards as so much ... well, he uses the common Greek word (*skybalon*) for dog poop. Repentance

is a deliberate act of extrication from all conventional sources of identity, entering the condition of being a dissident nonentity. That alone opens enough space for the gift of a core identity that is nothing less than identity with Christ, union with Christ. We find ourselves again with a self that is in Christ—ultimately, the only self worth having.

Psalm 126 uses ancient imagery for a new purpose. "Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves" (verse 6). We are hearing an echo from religious rituals dating back to the dawn of agriculture. Sowing seed was accompanied by ceremonies of death and burial, with dramatic wailing performed by women. Only then would the miracle of resurrection be ensured, with the joyful ingathering of the grain months later. The psalmist transmutes earth rituals into wisdom about life itself. Times of grieving and loss are often discounted, when they are actually seed-times, calling for trust and infused with the promise of new life.

[APRIL 14]

Love Letters

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Philippians 2:5-11; Luke 19:28-40

PERHAPS IT IS too much to expect the average Palm Sunday congregation to listen closely to the passage from Philippians that quotes at length a hymn extolling the self-emptying of the one who was equal to God yet took on the most degraded form of human identity, that of a slave. The pageantry of our commemoration of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem commands our whole attention. Yet we need to embrace this extraordinary song that Paul "sings back" to his Philippian friends in his letter from a Roman jail. It may have sounded very different to those who first heard and sang it. Research has now revealed that a lot of the language it uses matches expressions used in contemporary love letters! In these

Paul lists the unearned privileges that he once counted on.

love letters, the lovers describe themselves as feeling "equal to God" because they are in love. They refer to the temptation to abduct their love interests, using the same "exploitation" word as our hymn ("did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited"). Lovers describe the experience of self-emptying (*kenosis*), meaning the gut-wrenching vulnerability to rejection that we are all familiar with when we fall for someone.

It could be that this hymn was poetically conveying the insight that the whole drama of divine vulnerability that we now call the Incarnation is rooted in God's ecstatic desire for us. The hymn certainly gives lie to the persistent fable that it took until the Council of Nicaea in 325 C.E. to attribute divinity to Jesus. In this early Christian song, Jesus is acclaimed as the Ascended One who has been given "the name that is above every name" (verse 9). And there can be no doubt what that was—the awesome and unpronounceable divine name revealed in the burning bush!



[APRIL 21]

Alive in Christ!

Isaiah 65:17-25; Psalm 114;
1 Corinthians 15:19-26; John 20:1-18

THIS EASTER WE read from the oracles of Isaiah in which the exiles, recently returned from Babylon, are given a vision of Jerusalem as the hub of a new “peaceable kingdom.” The restoration bestowed by God on Israel is imagined to be rippling out from the rebuilt Holy City to accomplish undreamed of reconciliation throughout all of creation. This peace accord transmutes ancient enmities into friendship, so that even “the wolf and the lamb shall feed together” (65:25).

In Paul’s first letter to the church in Corinth, the ultimate restoration proclaimed by the prophets radiates out from the “ground zero” of Jerusalem where Jesus was executed, buried, and raised from the dead. The resurrection bestowed by God on the sacrificial son triggers the chain reaction that will ultimately leave nothing outside the embrace of new life. Notice is served that a new outpouring of life has begun, one more powerful than the death whose power to terminate and extinguish everything and everyone has appeared invincible until now. “For as in Adam all die, so all will be made alive in Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:22).

The fourth evangelist’s story of the discovery of the empty tomb takes us right into “ground zero” itself, creating an intimate and immediate impression. We see

the crouching of the disciples at the low entrance to the rock tomb, the shroud and head cloth seemingly folded with the care that thoughtful guests take when they strip the bed in the spare bedroom before leaving! And then Mary of Magdala’s mysterious encounter with the stranger who must be the gardener, but turns out to be the Living One, already on the way to God, the beating heart of the universe, to prepare a place for us—for us *all*. The garden graveyard near the killing field is the garden paradise in which a new humanity is being created!

[APRIL 28]

Open, Breathing Spirit

Acts 5:27-32; Psalm 150; Revelation 1:4-8;
John 20:19-31

JOHN’S GOSPEL COVERS two appearances of the risen Christ to the disciples in the upper room: first in the evening of Easter day and then a week later. We learn that John has a very different approach to the giving of the Holy Spirit from the one embraced by Luke. Luke’s version of a dramatic event that takes place on the Feast of Pentecost, 50 days after the Passover, has become universally adopted in the pattern of the church’s liturgical year. But John’s story of the Risen Christ breathing the Holy Spirit into the disciples at the close of the same day on which he was raised from the dead is perhaps more profound. The

disciples cower behind locked doors, fearful of the Judean crowd who are still out for the blood of the Galilean hotheads who had entered Jerusalem with the failed pretender Jesus. They are struggling to make sense of the empty tomb and Mary of Magdala’s uncanny experience in the garden. What was to come next?

Into this scene of bafflement and the disciples’ overwhelming self-mistrust Jesus himself comes, displaying his open wounds, greeting the disciples with shalom. Never had this everyday word of greeting resonated from such infinite depths. Peace flowing out from the defeat of death! In the scene that John paints we experience the receiving of Christ’s Spirit and the experience of being trusted by God as inextricably interwoven. How untrustworthy the disciples must have felt! But here there is no question of rehabilitation or penance. The Risen One trusts them immediately with the same trust that the Abba God had placed in him. “As the father has sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21). Thomas may have been absent because he had sequestered himself that morning to regain purity after defiling contact with tombs and grave clothes. Something utterly revolutionary is afoot. Belated he may be as an eyewitness to the wounds of the Risen One, yet he is the first to recognize that Jesus is God’s Word in the flesh: “My Lord and my God!” (verse 28). ■

“Preaching the Word,” *Sojourners’ online resource for Bible study and sermon preparation, is available at sojo.net/ptw.*

Curling Up With a Good Book...

LATELY I'VE BEEN reading non-fiction books, finding their less-debatable truths a comforting contrast to the fearsome unpredictability of today's world. Previously, I had blocked out that world by reading fiction from the horror genre, but stories about people facing unspeakable terrors just seem too cheery these days.

So I've settled on works that detail the hard facts of science, lately the origins of humankind. Did you know that we modern human beings are only one of several species of humans throughout evolutionary history? (Evolution being what Charles Darwin dreamed up to cover his childhood disappointment that unicorns weren't allowed on Noah's ark. So sad.)

I didn't realize that we current



thermostat never occurred to them.

It fell to us homo sapiens to do the hard work of invention, organization, and cooperation. We overlapped with the Neanderthals for a while, probably making for awkward, interspecies potlucks. ("Thanks for bringing the undercooked lizard, but we're vegan, starting now. Darn the luck.") On the

other hand, like any good guests, Neanderthals never overstayed their

welcome. Once the rainy season began, they moved on.

As those awkward social encounters diminished and Neanderthals left no forwarding address, we homo sapiens took over completely and became the really cool humans.

WE DID THAT by living beyond "biological necessity" and ushering in the "cognitive revolution" with the dawn of agrarianism, which I think was on a Tuesday.

Unfortunately, in leaving the hunter/gatherer lifestyle, we also left behind some of the good practices of the Neanderthal. They kept in shape by moving to where the food was and running a lot to avoid becoming a meal themselves. They adapted to changing environments and maintained a complex and varied diet. This led to healthier outcomes, lower cholesterol counts, and their reward of lollipop or plastic toy when they left the doctor's office.

The general healthiness of

Neanderthals has been proven through remains discovered in ancient grave sites, although the discarded wrappers from Nature Valley granola bars found nearby raise some troubling questions. Did the Neanderthals, who had never tasted cardboard, know the bars were food? Fortunately, the product survives to this day, and variations of it are used to make the boxes Amazon sends our stuff in. Another homo sapiens success story.

Ken Davis

...then falling asleep. (It wasn't *that* good.)

humans—called *homo sapiens*, which is Latin for "smarter than those Neanderthal doofuses" (*doofi?*)—didn't evolve as one species, seamlessly blending into each next version, like that drawing of hunched figures emerging from the sea to eventually straighten to full height and check email. No, each human species came into existence in a distinct arc of development.

Neanderthals, which preceded us, were actually stronger and had larger brains than the later homo sapiens, but lived virtually unchanged for millennia, their tools never improving, their nomadic lifestyle never maturing into more organized communities. They stubbornly stuck to their ways, and might even have said, "Hey, why reinvent the wheel?" had they invented the wheel in the first place. Which they didn't.

Fire they mastered quickly, of course, using it for cooking and warmth, but the programmable

IN HINDSIGHT, it's clear now that our forebears should have thought twice about preferring the back-breaking work of farming over the less restrictive life of the hunter/gatherer, who always gets the best stuff at yard sales. (Nothing good is ever left by the time I turn the car around!)

As a result, our slow trek to modernity has been punctuated by disease, over-crowding, warfare, and dependency on reduced food sources, such as minimally nutritious corn. But at least we got Diet Coke out of it. And let's not forget the development of modern currency (which we never seem to have enough of), labor-saving manufacturing that moved outside the U.S., and superior communications enabling us to listen to the entire message because the menu has changed.

Come to think of it, maybe we should look back at Neanderthals with envy rather than superiority. Wouldn't it be better to emulate their flexible lifestyles, their healthier diet? Maybe things really *were* better, back in the day. You know what I think? Dare I say it? I think we should "Make America Neanderthal Again."

Although, that may have already started. ■

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of Sojourners.



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You will make more mistakes if you remain still."

Pope Francis

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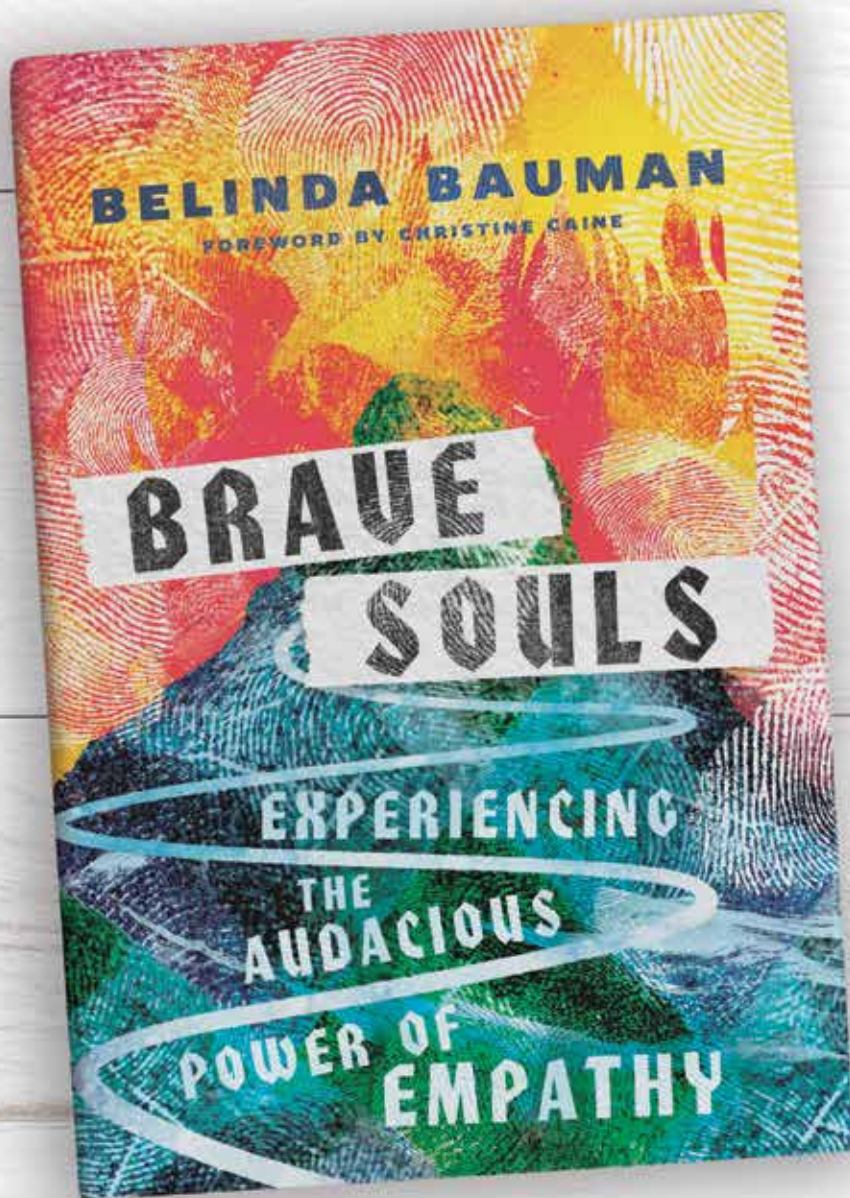


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